

The Silver Tarn



Another MEHITABLE Story

KATHARINE ADAMS

The Silver Tarn

BY KATHARINE ADAMS

Author of "MEHITABLE"

MEHITABLE WEBSTER had, as her name implies, a stern New England training in the little town of Cherryville, Vermont, where she was brought up. But Mehitable also had imagination, the capacity to realize beauty, and, above all, a flair for adventure and mystery.

These qualities came into full play when Madame Cateau, the headmistress of the school in Paris which Mehitable attended, transferred her establishment to the very north of England, and Mehitable found herself in the lonely old house on the moors, in the wilds of Yorkshire. Here Mehitable sensed the strange romance of the moor and discovered "the silver tarn" among its many secrets. From the mysterious pool she went on to solve another mystery, that of the lonely boy who had run away to hide in the cave on the moor.

With her skillful pen portraits of real life people, Katharine Adams brings realism, romance, and a sense of life in other lands to a delightful story that all girls will enjoy equally as much as the well-loved *Mehitable*.

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers*
NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

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Party from Girl Ellen
Christmas 1949

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The Silver Tarn

BOOKS BY
KATHARINE ADAMS

Mehitable
The Silver Tarn
Midsummer
Midwinter
Wisp, A Girl of Dublin
Red Caps and Lilies
Blackthorn

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The Silver Tarn

BY KATHARINE ADAMS



Grosset & Dunlap

PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK

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DEDICATED TO DAWN McCLINTOCK

Printed in the United States of America

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THE TARN

I saw you first when I had climbed a hill
Holding the secrets of the moor. You seemed
Part of all the sadness of the world,
Part of all that wistful hearts have dreamed.

Star-points have nestled in your silver soul,
Sunlight has touched you in its passing by.
There is no whisper that you have not heard,
Cold and inviolate underneath the sky.

MEHITABLE WEBSTER

CHAPTER I

"THERE IS THE MOOR!"

"MEHITABLE WEBSTER, I've called and called you. Why on earth don't you answer?"

A door slammed behind Una O'Hara as she stood regarding her roommate. Two photographs fell off the mantel and the wild wind from the Yorkshire moor caught a muslin curtain at an open window, twisting it into the semblance of a thin white ghost. It was twilight in the room and the figure kneeling by the window was only dimly outlined in the gloom.

Mehitable did not turn toward her roommate as she answered. She still looked off across the moor and she spoke dreamily: "I wasn't sure that you were calling me. I heard a voice, but it sounded way off."

"Do wake up, Mehitable. Don't moon there by the window. This place is bad enough at all times, but to-day it's fiendish. It's the most desolate, beastly hole in England, and I think we are fools to let ourselves be cooped up here." As she spoke, Una threw her tennis racket across the room. It fell with a clash on to the hardwood floor.

Mehitable stood up a little stiffly, for she had been

kneeling a long time by the window. She came across to the study table in the center of the room and, sitting down on the edge of it, clasped her hands about her knees and looked anxiously at her friend. *Mehitable's* brown hair was her worst enemy, as she always said. It simply would not stay put, and as she had been propping her head up with her two hands, while gazing out of the window, it looked more fly-away than usual. She looked so like the *Mehitable* of the year before that her friend smiled in spite of herself, frowning the next instant.

"You make it all seem so dreary here, Una. I'm sorry for you but I can't feel that way. To me it's—" *Mehitable* paused for the right word, looking off out of the window at the far, dim stretch of moorland—"it is enchanting!" She said the last word softly. Una broke in with a quick flood of passionate words.

"I'm ashamed of you, *Mehitable Webster*. You're perfectly satisfied to sit here and dream by a window and let other people fight and nurse and work and starve and die. It's time that you woke up!"

Mehitable looked at her friend in astonishment, realizing that she had never seen her quite like this before. It was one of the things most attractive about Una, her unexpectedness. She had been gayety itself at lunch time, relating a hunting story of her father's to an interested group. Now she was in a mood that had about it something of despair.

"I tell you, *Mehitable*, I won't endure it! There's something in me that won't bear this stodginess!" Una choked on the last words.

Mehitable's next remark was an odd one "Your

eyes are just like cat's eyes, Una," she said. The dusk had deepened in the room, and all the light there was seemed focused in Una's angry eyes. She did not in the least mind *Mehitable's* saying that her eyes resembled cat's eyes, for she knew that cats were very dear to her friend, and that the remark was intended more or less as a compliment. She came and sat down on the table beside *Mehitable*, and as she looked out at the purple blackness of the ever deepening night, she went on speaking rapidly:

"English schools are bad enough, Heaven knows, but a French school way up here on these moors is a perfectly mad idea. It was bad enough in Paris, but then we did have Paris. It was there, even though we didn't see it often. Madame has brought all of her absurd ideas along with her, up here. *Mehitable*, when I think of all that's happening, when I think that Patrick and Miles are fighting and that Hugh is in training, that father's gone to command a regiment in India and that mother and Molly are V. A. D.'s—and that I'm here stodging away in this silly school, I could scream and tear my hair!"

"It wouldn't do you a pennyworth of good!"

The voice coming suddenly from the open doorway made them both jump. *Mehitable* laughed. "Goodness, Nan, how you scared us!" she exclaimed.

The newcomer sat down on the edge of one of the three beds of the large, wind-swept room. She folded some knitting neatly, wrapping it in a large handkerchief which she drew out of her jacket pocket. Then she looked across at the other two.

"You're daft, *Mehitable*, spending all of rec hour

up here by the window. I looked in twice to tell you there was a good fire in the hall, but you seemed so pleased with your own company, I went out again." Nancy spoke severely.

Una jumped down off the table and ran out of the room.

"Una's wild to-night. She's miserable," *Mehitable* said slowly and perplexedly.

"There's no more cause for her being put about, than for the rest of us," Nancy Graeme answered calmly, going over to her chest and putting her knitting away in the top drawer.

"Yes, there is, Nanny. Think of it! Two of her brothers are fighting and her father's gone to India. Her mother and sister are training to be V. A. D.'s in London. I know how she feels just staying here and being a schoolgirl. Poor Una!"

"What about yourself, *Mehitable Webster*! You'd like to be with Young Madame in France—" Nancy said, turning toward her friend.

"Don't, Nan!" There was a choke in *Mehitable's* voice.

"Yes, you'd rather be there than anywhere, but you'd like anyway to be doing something like driving with Philippe in his car in London while he does messages. You're worried about your Aunt Comfort, home in Cherryville, Vermont. There's a whole ocean between you and your old friends and it's wartime, but you don't fash yourself and every one else."

The loud peal of a gong interrupted Nancy's last words, and the two friends ran out of the room,

Mehitable squeezing Nancy's arm affectionately. "You're so understanding, Nan," she said.

Fires were blazing in the wide fireplaces at each end of the large hall, or living room, of the school, but the long dining room with its rows of tables had an air of bleakness, and the hot tea was very welcome to the thirty girls who sat about the tables. Mehitable sat next Una, with Nancy on her other side. Una at once began to argue about a hockey match of the week before with a girl who sat opposite her. Apparently she had forgotten her tantrum, as Nancy would have called it, but Mehitable, who knew her so well, was sure that it was only a lull between storms.

"Treacle's a miserable thing. It's simply atrocious without butter," announced Theodora Manders, taking generous bites of bread and treacle. She was known as Tip, and she had been one of the girls at the Château school in Paris before the war and was now one of the victims, as Una called them, in the lonely house on the moors, in the wilds of Yorkshire. Madame Cateau, the head mistress of the school, had transferred her establishment to the very north of England. She was without a sense of humor and in her thorough way was trying to carry on her school on the same lines as in Paris. Madame's son was fighting, and her daughter-in-law was nursing, and when Madame was worried she was stricter and more unbending than at any other time. She did not understand the moorland country, and she found that it was not so easy to maintain her old Château ways of doing things. The English girls were on their own ground, so to speak, and in spite of herself, Madame had

had a piece of ground near the vegetable garden leveled off for a tennis court. A regular hockey team had been organized. Madame did not approve of any kind of violent exercise and sighed for the old Paris days when a decorous walk in the Bois was all that was thought necessary, but she was wise enough to sense that it would be a difficult school year. There was restlessness in the air. She had, therefore, reluctantly consented to the innovations.

Talk ranged high at tea, and in spite of no butter, a great many slices of bread and treacle were consumed.

"Tea's better than in Paris. That's one blessing," commented Jean Macy, a pale, pretty American girl, who had been one of the Château pupils. Her great friend, Clythie Grey, had gone back to the States, and Jean felt lost without her.

"I tell you, this school isn't worth a fig this year. It's neither one thing nor another. It isn't Paris, and it certainly isn't a proper English school. Madame's foggy old notions won't go. She'll find that out!" Una's hands clenched as she spoke.

"Don't be hysterical, Una, and it seems to me you're not talking as a loyal Château girl should talk." Tip Manders glared at Una, and Una glared back at her.

"Well, Theodora! Dear me! Allow me to present to you, girls, our dear Theodora Manders. Pattern after her well, girls, for she is our shining light. I might say, girls, that she is our star, or more prosaically, our example. She has never been known—and mark me well, she has been for many years a part, a valued part, of this establishment—she has never been known—"Una's voice sank to a whisper as she

delivered the last— "she has never been known to break a rule."

The laughter at this speech of Una's was so loud that a governess came in from the room beyond. "Please remember that you are young ladies," she remarked, as she sat down at a table in the center of the room and poured herself a cup of tea.

Tip joined in the laughter at Una's speech and took her up at once, saying in a mock-serious tone, "Yes, girls, I've done my little best to be, as it were, a star or pattern, but oh! I have failed. The task has been beyond me." She winked at Mehitable and grinned at a new girl who sat watching her. Mehitable smiled back at Tip and suddenly a lump came into her throat. Tip was so much a part of the fascinating and far-away Château days. She was glad that Tip had spoken as she did to Una. They all knew that the Château had really been the only home that madcap Tip had known for years, and that, however she might rail against it herself, she would not let any one else do so.

"Of course no one wants it to be a proper English school. I, personally, am through with the whole school idea. I don't intend to stay," announced Una, spreading treacle on a crust of bread.

"We must all have good times together. There are all sorts of things we could do. We could organize a fraternity as they do in schools at home," suggested Jean Macy.

"What a bore. Sorry, Jean, but that really sounds too deadly," returned Una.

"We might have a secret society," put in Tip.

"There's nothing secret or mysterious about Cluthers," Una objected.

"Una!" Mehitable turned and gave her friend a reproachful glance, and Tip grinned at them both.

"I thought we'd get a rise out of Mehitable pretty soon. Don't tell her there's nothing mysterious about Cluthers!" she exclaimed.

Noel Pope, a pale, brown-eyed English girl who sat at the head of the table and poured the tea, looked at Mehitable and Una with interest. She was a new girl, but it had somehow fallen to her lot to pour the tea, and no one objected. She was the oldest girl of a family of twelve, and pouring tea of an afternoon was second nature to her. The little group there at the table by the window had taken her into their circle from the first. She had never been away to school before, and she was not as yet quite used to the ways of these girls who had suddenly become her friends.

Mehitable leaned forward suddenly, speaking intensely, her face pale with earnestness. "Girls, don't you feel it—the wonderful, mysterious thing that is here all around us—the freedom? Don't you want to know it and love it? You must know what I mean. Why, I mean—the moor!"

CHAPTER II

JOSÉ BLANC

MEHITABLE knocked at Madame's sitting room door, and as she did so, she thought of the heavy velvet curtain in front of the *cabinet de travail* at the Château. Madame's crisp voice said "*entrez,*" and Mehitable opened the door and went inside. Madame sat at her desk, and her small dog, his tiny head jerked inquiringly to one side, sat on the rug in front of a small coal fire. The windows were tightly closed. Madame did not like moor air. The room was small and serviceable, but Mehitable read homesickness for the *cabinet de travail* in Madame's worried, sallow face.

"What is it then, *enfant?*" Madame eyed Mehitable rapidly. "Your hair is still untidy. Why is it that you can never learn to arrange it properly?"

Mehitable put up her hand guiltily and pushed a strand of hair under the black velvet ribbon that she wore across her forehead. Then she drew her thick braid across her shoulder and looked at it ruefully. "It does look rough. I meant to brush it one hundred times last night, but ——"

"You were moon gazing instead. I know it. You are old enough, Mehitable, to think of these things which are important. What is it that you desire?"

Madame changed the subject quickly, fastening her bright eyes on Mehitable.

Mehitable was silent. When Madame fastened her penetrating gaze upon her, she always found it difficult to express herself.

"*Tiens!*" Madame went on sharply. "What is it you would say?"

"It's—Oh, Madame." Mehitable clasped her hands in the impulsive way she had. "It's—the moor!"

"The moor—what of the moor? Ah! It is of a desolation!" Madame raised her thin, delicate hands with a quick shrug of dislike. Then she waited for Mehitable to go on speaking, regarding her with a puzzled expression, which had in it the suspicion of a smile.

Mehitable hesitated, for she knew that she could never make Madame understand how she felt about the moor. "If only you weren't afraid of the moor, Madame. It is so wonderful. I should be so happy if I could be free to go out on to the moor!" Mehitable looked at Madame entreatingly.

"Surely you do go there for your walks, when it is fine?"

Mehitable knew that she could never make Madame know how she felt about the moor. She tried to think of the right words and could only stand in confusion, her hands still clasped tightly together. She said, "I want to be free to know it for myself. There is a tarn—Oh, Madame! We walked there once with Miss Derk. You can't think how lovely it is. It's a straight walk, too, and it's not so very far. There is no way of getting lost as far as the tarn. No harm could come to

us. Madame, won't you let us go out alone on the moor at recreation? Please say yes. Let us feel the freedom of the moor, not just go for a short walk with a governess. It— isn't the same." Mehitable stopped speaking abruptly. She had been so engrossed in what she was saying that for the moment she had quite forgotten her awe of Madame who sat listening to her, frowning and thoughtful.

Madame had been thinking rapidly while Mehitable talked. They were not contented, these pupils of her's. Things were not so satisfactory as in the blessed Paris days, but that was more than one could expect. She had taken this old house called Cluthers (the very name made one shudder) because it was the only thing accessible at the moment, but she disliked it and its surroundings heartily. The Château girls were not making things any easier for her. They showed their discontent to the new pupils, and that was bad!

"There is, I suppose, as you say, no danger. Yes, you may go as far as the tarn, but no farther. How far is it, again?"

"It is two miles," Mehitable answered joyously.

"Two miles! But that is an everlasting walk. I do not think you will find many comrades to go with you." Madame regarded Mehitable a little curiously. How pale she was! She looked hardly older than when she had arrived the year before, a timid girl in an ugly brown dress and cloak. She was taller now, and the way she wore her hair became her. There was something, too, in her face that had not been there before. Yes, after all, she did look older. Madame thought back, in her rapid way, of old girls, head girls, lovely,

accomplished, occasionally brilliant girls. Mehitable was not one of them, and yet, because she was the friend of Madame's grandson, Philippe de Villiers, because, indeed, she was precious to her English daughter-in-law, or Young Madame, as the girls called her, Madame knew that there must be something a little different about Mehitable.

"Yes," Madame repeated. "You may all of you go out on the moor unattended by a mistress. You may go as far as the tarn on your holiday afternoon."

"Thank you, Madame," Mehitable smiled her thanks as she turned away. Then she paused a moment, her hand on the knob of the door. "There is no fresh news, I suppose, Madame?" she asked.

"No news—but wait. Yes, there is a message for you. I had forgotten." Madame unlocked a small drawer in her desk, and taking out a letter, opened it and read, "My love, of course, always, for Mehitable. There is little or no time for writing, but the next letter will be for her."

Mehitable said only, "Thank you, Madame," but there was a happy wave of color in her cheeks as she closed the study door. "The next letter will be for her!" How magical it sounded!

"Look out, Mehitable. Your shoe lace is untied, and I wouldn't choose these stairs to fall down. I fell half way myself last week and I know what it's like!" Tip called softly over the bannister and leaping down three steps at a time, descended the remainder of the tall flight with her arm about Mehitable's waist.

"Madame says we may go out alone on the moor, Tip. Isn't it dandy?" Mehitable took her jacket and

white tam from a hook under the stairs, and Tip, who was ready for a run in the garden, answered warmly:

"I should say so. You know, *Mehitable*," she went on as they walked down a long, bare passage toward the garden door, "this hockey business is a bit of a bore to me. It's a little too thick. *Una*'s being roped into the games more and more. She's awfully keen. You know that, don't you?"

Mehitable nodded, and as they went out into the faint, bleak sunlight of a November day, she thought over Tip's words. They crossed a long sweep of leaf-covered ground, and as they came within sight of a group under a great oak tree, they waved their hands. *Mehitable* was conscious of a feeling of which she was ashamed. She was jealous of a game the very name of which she detested. She scolded herself vigorously as she and Tip crossed the lawn. "Don't be a stupid goose, *Mehitable Webster*. Be glad that there's something to keep *Una* interested, and forget yourself! Be thankful there's something to keep her out of those wild, restless moods!"

They came up to the group of girls who hailed them loudly. Two or three sat on a low stone wall which ran along one side of the garden, separating it from the vegetable garden, beyond. The others sat under the oak. *Una* was fanning herself with her tam, for in spite of the dampness, the air was mild just then, at noon, and she had been running. It was several days since her outburst to *Mehitable* and she seemed to have more or less settled down again into the *Cluthers* routine. She made a place for *Mehitable* beside her on the wall.

"I've seen Madame and it's all fixed about our going out on the moor without a governess at rec time, and we can go to the tarn on holiday afternoons," Mehitable announced to the assembled group, and a general murmur of approval greeted the statement.

"That's decent of Madame," Una admitted, grudgingly. Then turning to Mehitable, she went on with, "How splendid of you, Hit, to beard the lioness in her den and ask the favor. You're an odd child. You're really petrified of Madame, and yet you're the one that does dare to ask things." She gave Mehitable an approving pat on the shoulder.

"For my part, I don't see why any one wants to roam off on this moor. It's endless, and so dreary. You can count me out on your excursions, Mehitable," exclaimed Jean Macy, smiling at Mehitable, but giving a very genuine little shudder. The moor frightens me. I think," she added.

"That's because you don't know the moor, Jean. I'll make you love it." Noel Pope spoke suddenly. She was sitting at Una's feet, her wide, faded, blue felt hat on her lap. "It's wild, wilder than you know, any of you. There are wild ponies, way off on the outer moors, yes, and wild people, too. We're Yorkshire people, you know. I've heard stories always. Moors are strange places."

"How fascinating! You make me keener than ever, Noel. I love your saying that. It sounded so mysterious!" Mehitable put in earnestly, and they all laughed.

"Mehitable's stark mad about the moor. Don't make her worse, Noel," laughed one of the Warthwall

twins, new girls from Devonshire, both popular and both very happy, in their happy-go-lucky way, at Cluthers.

"Jean will never love the moor. She'd rather sit close to the fire and write to Clythie any day. Gee! Imagine Clythie Grey here at Cluthers! How she'd loathe it!" said Tip.

Some one came flying across the garden, tripped on a jagged stone, caught herself and sank breathlessly down beside Noel on the ground. It was Peg O'Hara, Una's youngest sister, her hair flying, her face alight with smiles. "A plum cake's come from Winchy. I've hidden it, never mind where. We'll have a feast. It's a big one. Old Backbow brought it with the letters just now. Good old Winchy! She was our governess," she explained to Noel and the Warthwall girls. The Château girls all knew about the O'Hara's governess.

"She ought not to send a cake in war time," Una said, trying to put disapproval into her voice, and failing utterly.

"It's made with brown sugar. You needn't eat it if you don't want to, Miss Prunes and Prisms," retorted Peg. Then she called across to Mehitable, "I've millions of things to tell you, Mehitable. You and I will have the cake all to ourselves!"

"Well, you'll just do nothing of the kind, Greedy," put in Tip, and as the lunch gong sounded she jumped off the wall, the others following her example.

"No hope of letters until after lunch. How did you manage to get the cake, Peg?" asked Mehitable as they crossed the garden, Peg hanging on her arm.

"I saw old Backbow coming up the drive and jumped

on the back of his cart. The cake was done up in a brown, paper-covered box, and it sat on top of the post bag with some other parcels. It was addressed to me, so I just grabbed it. Wouldn't Madame be hot! Wasn't it luck!" Peg chuckled as she spoke.

"Peg, how naughty of you!" began Una, who walked at the other side of *Mehitable*, but with a jeering laugh, Peg darted ahead, turning to wave her hand as she disappeared inside the house.

"Peg is being absolutely spoiled here. She was bad enough at home. All the older girls here make a fuss about her. She does exactly as she likes, and the way she joins in the conversation all the time is simply impossible!" exclaimed Una as she and *Mehitable* came into the entry.

"Peg's a dear darling. I wouldn't have her different," *Mehitable* answered with a laugh.

There was no chance of going out on the moor that afternoon. During lunch the rain started to pelt against the windows and toward evening the wind began to wail and sough up and down the corridors.

"That ends any outdoor fun to-day," sighed *Meta Warthwall* after lunch, as they stood about in the hall waiting for the gong for classes.

"There's nothing to do but eat cake. We might have an impromptu feast with the cake as the chief attraction," suggested Una. She was sitting on the broad library table in the center of the room, cleaning a hockey stick with a grimy rag.

"The cake happens to be Peg's. She may have something to say about what we do with it," put in *Mehitable*.

"Oh, she can bring in her pal, that cheeky little Marcia Watts," Una responded airily, having quite forgotten her objection to the cake. "We might as well eat cake. There's nothing else to do," she repeated.

"Knitting!" suggested Noel Pope, adding with a laugh, "your helmet is really too awful, Una. I've tried to put it in some kind of shape, but it looks exactly like a rabbit."

Tip, who had just come up to the group about the table, laughed jeeringly. "Rabbit! Let us say a hippopotamus. I know of a way to make some money for war charities. Let's exhibit some of the works of art in the knitting line that Una has started since the term began. We could easily charge a bab for admission!"

"Start something else to-night, Una, one of the scarfs. They're the easiest. I'll help you," Noel muttered a little abstractedly as she turned the heel of the stocking she was knitting.

Una groaned. "Thanks, old girl. You mean well, but it's not in my line. I'm hopeless at all that sort of thing."

"Well, you'd better learn if you want to be a Red Cross nurse. They have to be clever with their hands," put in Nancy Graeme, offering Mehitable the side of a russet apple to bite.

Una shrugged her shoulders. She was used to Nancy's tart remarks and as a rule did not mind them. "Join us after lights are out," she whispered, turning to the Warthwalls and Fanny Trent. "You, too, Noel,"

she called softly as Noel turned toward the schoolroom at the sound of the gong.

Mehitable stopped beside Jean Macy who stood looking out of the window near the schoolroom door. They watched the fast falling rain for a moment.

"Mehitable, do you realize that Thanksgiving will be here in less than two weeks? Do you remember last year? Doesn't the Château seem awfully far away to you?" Jean asked.

Mehitable nodded and there was a quiver in her voice as she answered, "It seems like a dream, all of it."

"The play that you wrote all by yourself, Philippe's birthday, and the midnight feast in the music room—and Young Madame! Oh, Mehitable, I know she is wonderful and you are the one she loves the best of all!"

During the next hour while she was trying to translate the first act of "*Le Cid*," Jean's words kept running through her head, "You are the one she loves the best of all."

At recreation hour it was so dark that the maids went around with tapers, lighting the gas. The big bronze lamp on the hall table was lighted early, and the warm glow through its red shade gave an air of comfort and cheer, as did also the blazing fires in the fireplaces at each end of the big room.

"The wind is wuthering. That's what the Yorkshire people call it. Isn't that a good word, wuthering!" Mehitable made room for Meta Warthwall on the rug beside her.

"There's a book called 'Wuthering Heights.' You know it, don't you? One of the Brontës wrote it, not

Charlotte. It was Emily I think. It's dreary, if you like," said Noel, and turned laughing to Fanny Trent. "Come, Fanny, you must snuggle close to the fire. It's pathetic to see how cold you American girls are. Tip's the only one of you who isn't blue with frost all the time." Noel was used to a big, noisy family and to cosy times about wood fires. There was nothing alien or unusual about Yorkshire to her. She was glad that the American girls liked her and had taken her into their midst. They were different from any girls she had known, and they were always saying and doing unexpected things. She liked Mehitable, Una and Nancy, and the Warthwalls, and in spite of her anxiety about her brother who was fighting, she was happy at Cluthers.

There was another and larger group about the fireplace at the other end of the room. Peg, who was with the other group, came running across the room, a shovelful of hot chestnuts in her hand.

"Spanish chestnuts, just enough to go around. They're hot, so don't burn yourselves!" she exclaimed, pouring the chestnuts off on to the stone hearth.

"Bring the cake and Marcia Watts, to-night after lights are out. I saw the cake. It's a big one, but you were a stupid to hide it in your wardrobe. Du Bois might find it. When you want to hide things, bring them to me, my child," Una said to Peg as she turned away.

"As I remarked before, there's nothing to do here but eat cake," Una said, yawning.

"Come out of it, Una. Don't be such a martyr. We're all here together, and we can make this winter

one to remember. It isn't easy being here when our people are out fighting and there's so much worry at home, but let's not grumble," Noel Pope answered, and somehow when Noel spoke that way, Una never retorted.

"I know it, Noel. I'm hopeless, but it's in me, this hating everyday things and wanting excitement, and now, when there's so much in the world—it's hard to be out of it." There was a little catch in Una's voice, and for a moment no one spoke.

Miss Derk's voice sounded from the doorway, close by the fireplace, and it was not the strained, affable tone she generally used when showing visitors about. Neither was it the crisp, chill way in which she addressed the girls. It was a different voice, with a note almost of tenderness in it, and the girls looked up quickly at the sound. "This way, José. I want you to meet these girls," she said. She was not alone. A girl in gray was walking beside her, not hesitating, not shrinking from the astonished gaze of a roomful of girls who were watching her. She was taller than Miss Derk and she held her head high. She wore a loose-fitting, dark cap and a long gray cape, the lapel of which was thrown across her shoulder in military fashion. Her face was so white and of so fine a mold, that, as she stood there in the shadow, it might have been the face of a statue.

Again there was that new note in Miss Derk's voice, kindly, almost tremulous. "This is José Blanc, girls, and she has come to you from Belgium!"

CHAPTER III

IN THE ATTIC

"ARE you awake, Mehitable?"

"Yes."

Una came across to Mehitable's bed and wrapped herself in the blue downy at its foot.

"What do you think of her? Didn't she give you the impression that she was very odd? We all talked all the time, of course, and it's always a bit funky being new, but still, Mehitable, she said nothing, absolutely nothing. She just sat there and listened, and I had the feeling all the time that she was scorning us."

Una was interrupted by a voice from the bed in the far corner. "She ate the cake." As she spoke, Nancy reached for her magenta dressing gown, and jumping out of bed, slipped into it. Then she stepped into her bed-slippers, and coming across to Mehitable's bed, sat down at the foot. It was seldom that she joined in their talk at night, and Mehitable felt that she must be unusually interested in the subject of the new girl. Both Una and Mehitable were impressed by the fact that Nancy, in her usual Nancy-like way, was stirred out of her usual placid steadiness.

Una jumped up, and running across the room, took down her squirrel coat from a hook by the door, and spread it over herself and Nancy. Una's eager face,

framed in its bright hair, peered above the fur, and Nancy's red braids stuck out on each side of it.

Mehitable had thought constantly of the new girl since she had so unexpectedly appeared among them that afternoon; not only of the girl, but of her coming that way, so silently and suddenly out of the midst of the war and from a country whose name was on every one's lips.

"It was just like Madame not to tell us beforehand that she was coming," Mehitable said slowly. "José's an odd name—mysterious."

"She is mysterious. Don't you think so, Mehitable? What do you think about her?"

"It's because of her face. It's so different from other faces," Mehitable answered, and turning to Nancy, she asked, "What do you make of her, Nan?"

"She's fashed in her mind about something. She's been where there's trouble. It will be good for her to be here with us, learning plain ways and breathing moor air. Whatever the trouble is we'll not know about it from her, and all Madame said about her at prayers was that she's known trouble like all in her sad, brave country. That's all she means to tell us." This was a long speech from Nancy, and the other two were more than ever impressed by her interest.

"She's so still, girls. Did you notice? She hardly moved all the time she was in here. She just sat and listened. She was new and that might account for it, but—she seemed strange," Mehitable said, perplexedly.

Una was absorbed for the moment in the thought of the new girl and had forgotten her own woes tempo-

rarily. "Did you notice that no one asked her any questions at all, about Belgium? We couldn't, after what Madame said about her having seen trouble, but I did so want her to say something. Fancy, she's come straight from the heart of the war!" Una spoke excitedly.

"She'll not have too easy a time here. She'll be thinking back, all the time. She won't fit into our ways, and she doesn't want to make friends," commented Nancy.

"Cricky, Nan, don't be so gloomy about her. I'm not going to believe a word of that, are you, Mehitable?" Una often found Nancy's "dureness," as she called it, very trying. Una would have preferred to have had Mehitable alone as a roommate, but Mehitable and Nancy had shared a room together at the Château in Paris, the year before, and they had grown to understand each other very well the first few weeks at school when they had both been homesick and lonely. Mehitable hailed with delight the thought of Una's being with them in the room at Cluthers, so long as Nancy was glad, too. And although it would not have been like Nancy to enthuse at the idea, she had made no objection.

"You wanted some sort of war work, Una. Why not try all you can to make José happy?" suggested Mehitable.

"I might try it, but she doesn't look the cheering kind," Una answered.

Later when her two roommates were asleep, Mehitable thought over Una's words, "She doesn't look the cheering kind." That was true. José Blanc

would be hard to know. Mehitable thought over the events of the evening. She was not in the least sleepy and she was glad, because she loved a quiet time in which to think, when the whole busy, noisy school was asleep. The wind moaned eerily about the eaves. She was in a house at the edge of a wild Yorkshire moor. There were other moors beyond, stretching to the sea. She liked to think back two or three years to the days when she had no thought, or rather no expectation, of any life beyond that of the little Vermont village where she had always lived. It was thrilling to lie there in the chill darkness of the old house and to think about the old days and the wonderful things that had happened since. She smiled to herself as she remembered how she had once said to her great friend, Barbara, at home in Cherryville, that there never was time enough to think in, when Aunt Comfort was around. She smiled, but there was a lump in her throat. Aunt Comfort would have been surprised, indeed, if she knew how often Mehitable thought of her and longed for her. As she lay there in the silence, she could see in her mind's eye the sitting room in Aunt Comfort's house in Cherryville with its stiff furniture. She could see Aunt Comfort herself taking quick, competent stitches in a petticoat that was to accompany her niece all the way to France. She could see Patchwork, the cat, sitting in a patch of sunlight, her dear whiskered face raised inquiringly, as she watched the needle dart in and out.

Other pictures came to her as she lay tucked up in the narrow, school cot. Desire, the "help" at Aunt Comfort's, standing smiling in the doorway, fresh

from gingerbread making. Miss Prince, the thin, pinched village dressmaker, taking tucks in the red and white checked silk dress, made over from one of Aunt Comfort's. She shuddered as she thought of it, and felt guilty, too. She had given away the red and white checked silk dress to a maid at the Château.

Her thoughts wandered to José Blanc. That very morning they had not known of her existence. How beautiful José's face was! It was like that of a statue she remembered in the Louvre. It was like the face of the pictures of Jeanne d'Arc. "She is so unhappy that she is almost dumb. I wish we could help her," was Mehitable's last thought as she fell asleep.

As Nancy had prophesied, helping José was not an easy task. She did not seem to want to make friends, and although she was always polite, she never encouraged any advances and never made any herself. As the days went by, the look of trouble in her eyes deepened. There was nothing surprising in this. Her home was broken up, and the uncle with whom she had always lived was fighting. She herself had been obliged to flee from Antwerp with friends. It was these friends, people on a neighboring estate, who had made arrangements, at her uncle's command, that she come to Cluthers. She never spoke of any of this, herself. She went through the school routine quietly, learning her lessons with the others, in the big, low-ceilinged, one-time drawing-room of Cluthers, a room so different from the old *salle d'étude* of the Château. She recited in the dreary classrooms, answering questions in a cold, assured sort of way. Her French was

exquisite. There was only one person at Cluthers in whom she took the slightest interest.

José was standing, one afternoon, by the fire in the hall, the day after her arrival at Cluthers. Fanny Trent and Una were standing near her. They had just suggested a walk on the moor, which José had politely declined. Suddenly she put her hand on Una's arm. "Who is that? Who is that little girl?" she asked, and, although she spoke quietly, there was an imperious note in her voice. Peg had bounded into the room, her curly hair flying, as usual. She waved her dark blue tam triumphantly. "I beat," she called out, boisterously. The voice of Madame Bourget sounded from a far end of the room where she was correcting papers. "*Voyons, enfants*, this is not a stable, and we are not jockeys! This is a *pension* for young ladies."

"Who is she?" José repeated, as Peg ran up to her. Then, "It is my little sister, Marguerite, the youngest of the O'Haras. Peg, this is Mademoiselle Blanc," Una turned toward her sister.

Peg held out her hand and José took it, looking intently into her face. Then she turned and walked out of the room, without a word.

"José is queer. I never saw any one like her before. She certainly seemed to wake up for a minute, when she saw Peg." Una tucked some paper and kindling under a big piece of wood as she spoke, bending over a rusty fireplace in one end of an unused part of the attic at Cluthers. They had discovered it a few days

before and had adopted it as their especial retreat. "Where are the matches?" Una turned, looking across at a group on an old carved chest. "There they are, under the chest. Throw them over, Tip."

Tip jumped down off the chest, and Fanny Trent immediately took her place between Mehitable and Noel. "Here are the matches, and here's Jean," she said, waving a lean, brown hand at a figure emerging dimly from the dusky recesses of the attic.

"I'm so glad we found this spot. It's so mysterious and——"

"Spooky," put in Fanny.

Jean came and sat on a low, rickety stool near the fire. Her pretty face was pale and she leaned forward dejectedly, her chin in her hands. "I thought I'd never get away. Du Bois was around, and I think she's a bit suspicious. She knows we're not outside. It's raining hard and I think she's beginning to wonder where we are. It is good to get away, isn't it?" Jean sighed as she spoke.

"You bet," answered Tip, sitting down on the floor at Jean's feet. "Too bad Clythie isn't here," she went on gloomily.

"Clythie! Ye Gods! She'd be bored to tears!" ejaculated Una.

"Well, we wouldn't be so bored, ourselves," Tip returned. She was very loyal to her friendship with pretty Clythie Grey, and so was Jean Macy.

"Let's change the subject or we'll have Tip and Jean weeping," suggested Mehitable from the chest. Clythie Grey was one of the few people in the world whom Mehitable felt it difficult to like. "I like her

better than I did the first term at school, anyway," she thought.

"Where are the Warthwalls?" Fanny Trent inquired of Jean.

"Audrey may come up if she finishes an essay in time. Miss Derk made her write it as a punishment for impudence, as she put it," answered Jean, accepting a russet apple from a bag that Tip passed to her.

"How I do despise that woman," Tip remarked, walking leisurely over to the chest and holding out the bag to its occupants.

"What a ripping draft. Isn't it simply too perfect, finding this fireplace, way over here in the corner, and actually being able to build a fire in it!" As she spoke, Una leaned back on her hands, in her characteristic attitude.

"Don't smoke us out of house and home. I think it's anything but a good draft. Let's hope they won't smell the smoke downstairs. Our goose is cooked if they do," put in practical Noel.

"Jehosephat, but I wish we had some marshmallows to toast," sighed Tip.

"Tip's homesick for the Château and the little town of Paris," said Una, between puffs. Her first enthusiasm about the draft was fast dwindling. A feeble flame shot through the gloom, now and then, and much smoke twisted uneasily about the few sticks, licking languidly at the paper.

"We never in the world could have escaped this way at the Château. They always knew where we were every minute," Mehitable said to Fanny, who groaned.

"Do stop talking about that fascinating Château, all

of you. I simply cannot stand it. It makes me blue with envy. I should think you'd all be simply limp with longing for it. Paris—and this!" Fanny Trent turned up the collar of her smart, gray sweater and glanced out of a small, dusty window above her head at a leaden sky.

Una regarded the tip of her shabby, brown house slippers, still leaning back on her hands. "Yes," she repeated slowly, "Paris and this!" Then she caught Mehitable's eye, laughed, and went on speaking. "Mehitable has lost her heart absolutely and entirely to the moor. She spends all her spare time, as you all know, wandering over it. She kneels at our bedroom window, gazing out at it, until Nan and I are ready to shriek. She dreams about it and has written a poem about it. Say it, Mehitable. It's not half bad."

"Yes, say it, Mehitable," came a chorus of voices.

"Fiddlesticks, I'll do nothing of the kind," Mehitable said firmly, frowning at Una.

"Cut the coy, shy act, Mehitable. You're among friends, *mon brave*. Out with it!" Tip shook a threatening fist at Mehitable, as she spoke.

A voice reached them suddenly from the gloom of the larger attic beyond. "I heard your voices from the top of the stairs. You'll sing another tune, if you don't have a care." Nancy emerged from the dusk, knitting in hand.

"Hullo, Nan. Sit here." Tip patted the floor beside her invitingly, and Nancy sat down and opened up her knitting. "It's almost time for the gong, but I couldn't get away before. This isn't much of a place. What-

ever do you see about it that so takes your fancy?" Nancy looked around her disapprovingly.

"Isn't that just like Nan!" exploded Tip. "Always wet-blanketing something. Now don't look scared, Mehitable, Nan and I are not going to fight. Go on and say your poem, like a good girl."

"Yes, do just that little thing, Mehitable," Fanny Trent smiled encouragingly, and after a moment's hesitation, Mehitable said her poem.

"THE MOOR

"Paths that wind through the gleaming gorse——"

"Wait a jiff, Mehitable. Did you bring up the bag of nuts, Una? They're all cracked."

"No, and do be still, Tip. Go on, Mehitable," put in Una.

"THE MOOR

"Paths that wind through the gleaming gorse,
Wandering on to the far-away
Where the deep rose of the heather hills
Fades to the heart of the evening gray—
There where the dreams of the long ago
Whisper as they go fluttering by,
The rise and fall of the purple moor
Fades to the edge of a starless sky."

"Mehitable, it's dear!" exclaimed Una.

"Very nice, Mehitable," said Noel, and that meant that she thought it beautiful.

Nancy said nothing, but nodded approvingly, going

on with her knitting. She had heard the moor poem before.

"Think of being at school with a real poet!" exclaimed Fanny Trent with real appreciation. She was older than the others, and without being in the least condescending or intending to do so, made them all feel it.

"Just where do we see all this purple and rose, Mehitable? Your moor looks a bit bleak, just now," Tip began, when a voice suddenly broke in on them.

"Pardon—I must pass through." Some one emerged from the darkness of the back attic, the only access from which was the small room in which the girls were sitting. José Blanc stood before them, her gray cape thrown back across her shoulders. As she stood there in the astonished silence, the sadness in her eyes changed to something very like hate.

Noel Pope was the first one to recover from the surprise of José's sudden appearance. She jumped down off the chest. "Sit here, won't you, José?" she said.

José passed by them quickly and it seemed at first as though she was not going to answer. She paused, however, when she reached the other doorway, turned suddenly, and faced them.

"I thought that off there, at the end of the attics, I could be alone. There is no other spot in this terrible school where one can think. I heard your voices, and I have waited all this time. I do not want to stay with you. You do nothing but laugh and eat. You know nothing, nothing, I tell you, of suffering. I do not want to know you. You think only of yourselves. You

shut your eyes to all misery, the misery of all that lies outside this place, the misery of a world that is bleeding." The clear, even, icy tones of her voice failed on these last words, and before any one could speak, she was gone.

CHAPTER IV

MISS MEADOWS GOES TO CHERRYVILLE

"DESIRE, do you think you will have time to see to the biscuits before you go to the train?" Miss Comfort Webster looked up anxiously at her handmaid and friend. Miss Webster was polishing thin silver spoons with a piece of soft chamois.

"Now, Miss Webster, don't you start worryin'. It won't do you a mite of good. You'll find that everything's hunky dory when supper time comes." Desire spoke reassuringly, looking over her glasses at her mistress. "Don't you worry a mite, Miss Webster," she admonished.

"The train may be late and that will make your supper late. It would have been better if Miss Meadows had planned to arrive in the middle of the day." Miss Webster spoke a little severely. It was her way, when she was excited, and she was very much excited at this moment.

"The train ain't been late once this week. This snow ain't anything. It's just a flurry. T'aint drifting! Just give a look at the pies. They ain't quite brown." Desire finished her sentence through the half-opened kitchen door. She was dressed for her walk through the snowstorm to the station, and, after a hasty look at the oven, she drew on a pair of brown stockings

over her gray cloth gloves. Miss Webster had followed her into the kitchen, and Desire spoke to her apologetically as she went toward the back door. "I'll take'em off when I git to the station, but I ain't goin' to risk chilblains, even if she is *Mehitable's* friend!" She went out the back door and down the snow-covered steps.

Miss Webster walked slowly about, pausing first in the dining room to straighten a spoon, one of the freshly polished ones which she had placed a trifle crookedly. She straightened the round, spindle-legged salt cellars at each end of the table, then went on into the sitting room. There was a bright spot of color on each of her cheeks. She was as excited as Desire, and that was saying a great deal. After a year and two months she was to have first-hand news of her niece, was to meet face to face some one who had seen and talked with *Mehitable* in Europe, who had in fact traveled with her across the Atlantic.

The side door slammed, and Patchwork pricked up his ears. He had followed Miss Webster from room to room, sensing the general excitement. There was a sweep of cold air and Barbara, *Mehitable's* great friend who lived next door to Miss Webster, ran into the sitting room.

"A white dress, child! Are you sure the house is warm enough?" Miss Webster eyed Barbara anxiously as she unfastened the dark cloak which she wore over a frilly summer dress.

"Well, I wanted to wear something a little festive. Don't you recognize it? It's the grammar school graduation dress. let down and made over. It's such

a part of all *Mehitable* and I did that summer. I found it in a trunk the other day and I've been fussing with it ever since. It reminded me so—Oh, Aunt Comfort—It brought *Mehitable* back so." Barbara stood still for a moment, her arm across her face. Miss Webster patted her shoulder.

"There, don't cry. You want to look your best for Miss Meadows. You don't want her to write *Mehitable* that she found you crying!" Miss Webster spoke kindly, and there was a suspicion of moisture about her own eyes.

Barbara smiled through her tears. "I know it. I'm so happy at the thought of seeing Miss Meadows. I've been thinking more than ever about *Mehitable* lately, all sorts of things. Just think how different her life is from mine now, Aunt Comfort." Barbara choked on the last words. She had started in to call Miss Webster Aunt Comfort just after *Mehitable* had left for Europe and she had done so ever since.

"Patchwork, I believe I'll tie a ribbon on you. It would please *Mehitable*." Miss Comfort went over to her sewing table and opening a drawer took out a pink satin ribbon. Patchwork submitted to the adornment meekly, the ribbon giving his neck a thin, odd appearance. He knew that there was something unusual in the air, and was ready to enter into whatever it might prove to be.

"I meant to come earlier, Aunt Comfort, but there was a leak in the sink and I had to wait until Smythe sent up a man to fix it." Barbara disappeared into the hall, coming back a moment later without her cloak

and rubbers. Then she disappeared a second time, into the dining room, her arms filled with bundles.

"Here are the things for *Mehitable*. The blue Russian blouse is in this square parcel. I made it as small as I could without creasing it. It is just the color she loves."

Miss Webster had seen the blouse which Barbara had made for her friend in far away Yorkshire. She, herself, was sending four pairs of warm, brown, winter stockings, and a blue scarf. "*Mehitable* will go right up in the air when she sees the blouse, Barbara. You know how *Mehitable* is: way up in the clouds, or way down in the depths." Miss Webster spoke grimly, but there was a twinkle in her eyes.

"Yes, that's *Mehitable*," laughed Barbara, excitement in her voice, as she followed Miss Webster into the dining room. "Silas put ashes on the sidewalk and the steps of the side porch. He said everything would be frozen crisp by to-night. Does the table look all right, do you think, Barbara?" Miss Comfort moved toward the side door leading to the porch. At the same moment there was the sound of stamping feet, voices, and then the sudden opening of the door, as Desire and the expected guest came in.

It seemed as though they had always known Miss Meadows before she had been in the house five minutes. She was so brisk and friendly and jolly, and had so much to say about *Mehitable*, right away, that the ice was broken before they sat down to supper. She called Barbara by her first name at once. "I know you won't mind if I say Barbara. *Mehitable* talked of you so much on the voyage, and last spring in Paris, that I

feel as though we must be friends." They were on their way into the dining room.

Desire was as anxious as Miss Webster for the supper to be good. She seemed to know the exact instant when the plate of hot biscuits was empty and to appear like magic with a fresh batch. She and Miss Meadows had become quite well acquainted on their walk up from the station, having the congenial topic of *Mehitable*.

"We're giving you plain fare, Miss Meadows, just our usual Saturday night, baked-bean supper," remarked Miss Webster, as she served the amber-brown beans which had been simmering all day in the oven.

Miss Meadow's ruddy, friendly face beamed with pleasure. "You can't know what this supper means to me, Miss Webster, but if you had lived five years in a New York apartment hotel, you would know. It's the kind of supper I often dream about, as *Mehitable* would say." She spoke so sincerely that they all believed her, and Desire winked some tears from her eyes as she went out to the kitchen for the coffee.

Miss Meadows was off to Europe in a week's time. She was so used to going back and forth every year that she did it as a matter of course, but this time it would be different. She was going over to do war work; anything they needed done, she was willing to try. Barbara scarcely touched her supper. It was so strange to have Miss Meadows sitting opposite her. She was so evidently of the world, and so competent. In a month's time she would see *Mehitable*. She was already a part of *Mehitable's* letters and diary, a part of the *Château* in Paris, and soon she would be a part of *Cluthers*, too.

"It was more than good of you to come 'way up to Vermont to see us. I wish I could keep you longer than just this one night, but I know your time is short," Miss Webster said, trying not to show too much pleasure at her guest's praise of the supper.

"I've wanted to come ever since I came back last June, but one thing or another has seemed to prevent it. Now that I have decided to go to England, and will see *Mehitable*, I had to come. Think of her delight in hearing all about to-night. I must remember everything, what you wear and what you say. It will all mean so much to *Mehitable*."

"In just a little while perhaps you will see her. It's so wonderful—you'll see *Mehitable*!" As she talked across the table to Miss Meadows, Barbara felt the tears coming to her eyes and blushed in sudden embarrassment. What a child they would think her!

Miss Meadows answered briskly and cheerfully. "No one will ever take your place with her, Barbara, I am sure of that," she said. Barbara felt a warm glow at her heart and a tiny fear that had been nestling there vanished entirely. Before she knew it she found herself asking question after question, to each one of which Miss Meadows had a captivating reply. Yes, *Mehitable* had had some wonderful times in Paris. They listened with breathless interest as Miss Meadows told them about the Mardi Gras afternoon. "The parade you have heard all about from *Mehitable*. I'd seen the Mardi Gras often enough in Paris but it was a novelty to me to have the cakes and chocolate at the cottage of that little old woman in the Bois, afterward."

They had pushed back their chairs as Miss Meadows said this last, and were by the fire in the sitting room as she went on speaking. "It must all be so different now. You see, I haven't been with *Mehitable* at all since the war. Her letters from *Cluthers* are full of rhapsodies of the moor." Miss Meadows glanced toward the dining room and caught *Desire's* gaze fixed upon her as she bent over the table to remove the glass dish of "floating island" and a plate of spicy fried cakes which had constituted their dessert. She turned to Miss Webster saying, "Do you know, I won't feel that I really know *Mehitable's* home until I've had a little talk with *Desire*. If you don't mind, I believe I'll see if she will let me come into her domain for a little while." A few moments later she was drying the dishes, carrying on an animated conversation with *Desire*.

"I am real glad you came right out here. Miss Webster means well, but she don't know *Mehitable* as I do, and she never has. Why, I know that dear child through and through." *Desire* turned on the hot water faucet, then leaned confidentially toward her companion. "Now for one thing, Miss Webster picked out a brown and grey wool scarf to send to *Mehitable*. Miss Meadows, *Mehitable* can't abide them two colors. Well, for once, I just plumb out and said what I thought. I says 'Miss Webster, ain't you got no imagination at all? Ain't you lived long enough with *Mehitable* to know that she loves blue like jam?' Miss Webster was real nice about it. She went right down town and changed it for a blue one. She's softened up considerable since *Mehitable* went away. She looks

mightily peaked to me, lately. I guess she misses that young one most as much as I do. I've knit Mehitable a blue petticoat to send by you. It's for her to wear when she goes out on that moor she's always writin' about ——"

Barbara's face appeared in the kitchen doorway. "The girls are here, the Bently twins and Lucy Graves. They've come to hear about Mehitable."

Desire gave a gesture of despair. "There it goes! I never get real worked up about a thing when along comes somethin' to stop it short. I can just keep an ear out while I'm puttin' away the dishes, for I don't want to miss a word about Mehitable!"

"Yes, do that, Desire, and remember how much Mehitable loves you," Miss Meadows said cordially as she went out of the kitchen with Barbara.

The sitting room seemed full of faces when they entered it. Introductions were given and Miss Meadows found herself the center of a tense and interested group, Barbara on a hassock at her feet, the Bently twins, Ruby and Saidie, either side of her on the sofa, with Lucy Graves in the big rocking-chair next it, and Johnny Gray, Lucy's cousin, facing her, looking ill at ease and shy. Patchwork purred peacefully on Miss Meadows' knee. Miss Webster knitted quickly in her usual straight-backed chair by her sewing table.

Every time Miss Meadows looked up she felt Johnny's eyes full upon her. She saw him as a shy, awkward boy and she wondered vaguely, as she answered questions, what there was about him that Mehitable had found so congenial. She did not dream that to him she was not just a friend of Mehitable's

come to bring them news of her, but rather was she the embodiment of what the world meant to him—Europe, art, adventure. In spite of all the happy chatter going on around him, in spite of the fact that he was sitting in the familiar Webster sitting room, his childhood friends beside him, he was consumed with embarrassment. He could not say a word. Even shy Saidie Bently was asking questions, but when Barbara said, trying to draw him into the conversation, "John Gray and Mehitable and I have played together since we were four," he still was silent.

"Just think of all that has happened to Mehitable since we saw her last! I think it was the most thrilling adventure, her going to Belgium and escaping with Philippe de Villiers in his car, and picking up refugees!" exclaimed Lucy Graves.

"That was after I saw her, of course. Remember, I've not seen her since she went to Ireland with Una O'Hara to visit at Garth Hall," answered Miss Meadows.

"Well, sometime she'll tell us all we want to know. Letters aren't the same. She says that they're not allowed to write letters except Sunday afternoons, though she does scribble off notes whenever she can during study hour." Barbara blushed as she spoke, remembering too late that Aunt Comfort would in no way approve of this.

"Yes, you may be sure she scribbles most of the time. I shouldn't wonder if it's scribble first and study afterward, with Mehitable," commented Miss Webster. She was enjoying it all as much as any of the

others. She sounded severe about the scribbling, but in spite of her apparent disapproval, she had Mehitable's poem, "The Wishing Well," which had been published the spring before, put away carefully in an upper bureau drawer.

There was a sudden pounding and stamping of snow out on the side porch, and the side door opened and shut with a bang. The next moment a pair of bright, brown eyes peered around at them from the corner of the dining room door, and before they knew it, Robin Ward was in their midst, a radiant, snow-covered figure, smiling at them all. He carried a covered basket and besides the breath of cold air, he seemed to bring with him all the charm of the frosty, moon-lit night.

"Hullo, everybody! I brought some hickory nuts for your party, Aunt Comfort," he announced, smiling mischievously as he said, "Aunt Comfort," for none of the others, except Barbara, dared to call her that. He came up to Miss Meadows as he spoke and held out his hand, first tucking his cap in the wide pocket of his gray coat. "I'm so glad to see you, Miss Meadows. I hear that you're off to Europe to do war work, and that you may take your car. Don't you want to take me along, too? I could do an odd job or so. I might be very useful!" Robin grinned.

There was a moment's silence and then like a bomb came Miss Meadows' reply, "Yes, I do, Robin Ward. I want a boy just like you to do the odd jobs and to cheer me when I'm down-hearted." Miss Meadows smiled, but her voice was earnest.

"I'm your man," Robin answered, trying to keep excitement out of his voice.

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Miss Webster, putting down her sewing.

"I knew I'd find the right boy. I've thought about this for some time. You're just the one I want, Robin Ward. I can promise you hard work. If your people will let you go and I can arrange about passports and all the rest of it, will you be ready to go with me in a month's time?" Miss Meadows was always quick and to the point. She looked at Robin keenly, and he looked back, saying in a voice that somehow was his and yet sounded different to them all, "I'll be ready, Miss Meadows."

"You might go down cellar for some apples, Johnny," suggested Miss Webster dryly. "You can take the brass bowl off the sideboard."

Johnny was out of the room in an instant and down in the dusky, damp cellar, fragrant with apples. He filled the big brass bowl with snow apples and spitzenburg, then he sat down on an overturned cider barrel, holding the bowl of apples on his knees. He suddenly buried his face on his arm and sobbed. No one saw him but an inquisitive mouse who whisked away into the shadows. Robin would go. It was always so. It always had been, and it always would be. Robin was the right one to go. Nothing ever came to him. Nothing ever would. Bitterness came close to him, clouding him. He did not grudge Robin the adventure. It was not that, so much as the feeling that he had known for so long, the feeling that for him

life always would be drab. When he came upstairs to join the jolly, excited, hickory-nut party, with Miss Meadows in its midst, he seemed the same Johnny who had gone down cellar for the apples, but he knew that he had left a dream among the dust and cobwebs.

CHAPTER V

"FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW"

BARBARA slammed the oven door.

"Your cake will fall," commented Ruby Bently from her seat on the kitchen table.

"I don't care if it falls flatter than a pancake, or if it's burnt to a cinder. I don't care about anything at all!" Barbara had been kneeling in front of the stove, and her cheeks were pink from the heat of the oven. As she crossed over to the table, she did not respond to Ruby's grin.

"What's the matter, Barbie?" Lucy Graves looked up from her task of picking almonds out of a pan of very hot water as she put the question. She spoke in a gentle unthinking sort of way which was peculiar to her. She sat by the table, handling the hot nuts gingerly, her scarlet Russian blouse making a startling dash of color in the gray kitchen.

"I wish Lucy wouldn't call me 'Barbie.' It's Mehitable's name for me," Barbara thought, answering Lucy vaguely with, "Oh, nothing."

"Robin's going to have quite a good-by party. We'll dance, of course. His train doesn't go until midnight," Lucy went on, a little taken out of her usual placidity by Robin's departure.

Barbara went on into the pantry without replying,

and when she was out of hearing, Ruby leaned over and whispered to Lucy, "Isn't it fun? She's frightfully blue to-day, and simply hasn't an idea about what's going to happen. She can't think of anything except the fact that Robin's going to see Mehitable." As Barbara came back into the room with a plate of butter which Lucy was to melt for the almonds, Ruby jumped off the table and one-stepped across the room. A year had made a great difference in Ruby. She had lost some of her plumpness and had acquired a certain assurance.

There was a whistle from the direction of the side porch. Then the kitchen door was opened with a jerk and Robin Ward swung himself around the corner, crossed the room to Lucy's side, bowed with mock ceremony to the three girls, and helped himself to an almond.

"All packed yet, Robin? Or rather, has your mother finished packing for you?" asked Ruby.

"I superintended it. Mother had all my things laid out to pack. I mean things like skis and tennis rackets. The old dear has simply no idea of what it all means." Robin sniffed appreciatively. "Cake baking?" he asked, turning to Barbara who was mixing icing in a yellow bowl at one end of the table.

Barbara nodded, saying after a minute, "All for you, of course. The cake of life always comes your way."

The others laughed at this, but Lucy Graves remarked soberly as she went over to the stove with the pan of almonds, "I don't see that going over into all that danger is anything to envy."

"He won't be in any danger. Miss Meadows is just sort of going over to be on hand to help in any way she can. You'll be in London or Paris most of the time, won't you Robin?" put in Ruby.

Robin grinned as he answered her, watching Barbara lift the nicely browned cake from the oven. "I hope we'll be where there's something doing," he said. He did not add that Miss Meadows had applied for motor corps service for both of them, and after many letters back and forth and much red tape, had succeeded in obtaining it, providing they passed their medical test in New York.

A motor horn honked outside, and Ruby opened the door leading to the side porch and looked out. "It's Erastus," she said over her shoulder, and a voice called,

"I'm ready whenever the bunch is!"

"I won't be ready for an hour yet, Ras!" Barbara called over Ruby's shoulder, her voice sounding clearly across the silver crusted lawn.

They were to have a farewell party for Robin at Stebbins' farm which was ten miles from Cherryville, and their favorite outing place. Old Mrs. Stebbins lived alone in a rambling old farmhouse, but she was not alone very much of the time. She had all she could do "puttin' up" lunches for picnics and sleigh rides, when she was not spreading her own table for a merry crowd liable to descend upon her without much warning. She might have grown into a shiftless, limp widow, but instead she was a cheery, busy soul whom the young people of all the country around rose up and called blessed. Erastus Peters was to take some of their

crowd out to the Stebbins' farm in his motor. He waited good-naturedly while the girls packed baskets which he and Robin carried out to the car.

The cake was the last thing to be packed and as Robin lifted the box which contained it from the kitchen table, he said to Barbara in his whimsical way, "I wish I could take it to *Mehitable!*"

Barbara smiled sadly and Robin said teasingly, "Ah, just as I feared. Thou art cast down at the thought of losing thy one-time playmate!"

"She's glad to be rid of you, Robin Ward, but she's sad because you may see *Mehitable* and she won't," remarked Ruby, twisting a blue silk scarf about her throat.

Robin clasped his hands and staggered across to Lucy who was covering the delicately browned almonds with tissue paper. "Surely you will miss me, Lucy, and will give me a kind word before I go?" he said tragically.

Lucy answered, "Don't be a goose, Robin," but she blushed.

A little later an impatient motorful of young people waited in front of Miss Webster's small, white house, tooting horns and calling, "*Ruby!*"

Ruby was speaking to Miss Meadows in the hall at Miss Webster's.

"She doesn't suspect anything. Her suitcase is packed. I did it while she went on some errands before she baked the cake. Her father won't be back until Monday. I have his note to give her, safe as can be. You are an angel to do it, Miss Meadows. Barbara

misses Mehitable so dreadfully. Seeing you and Robin off on the boat will be a little bit like going herself."

Miss Meadows answered in her hearty way, "It will be great fun taking Barbara to New York, and I want her to have a splendid time."

Miss Webster spoke from the sitting room. "They're making such a racket, Ruby. Don't keep them waiting any longer."

Ruby was off, down the steps and across the lawn almost before Miss Webster had finished speaking. She was tucked in between Lucy Graves and Amy Ward, a cousin of Robin's who lived with his family. She was home from boarding school for Thanksgiving vacation. She had been brought up with all the Cherryville girls and although a little older than the others, she always joined in their good times. She was a jolly, athletic sort of girl, a prime favorite with them all.

"Auntie's so funny about Robin's going to Europe. She doesn't really know what he's getting in for and it's just as well. He will be in the thick of the fight, one way or another, I'm sure of it," Amy remarked as they dipped down into snowy hollows and then sped swiftly up an icy hill, blue shadowed snowbanks on either side of them. Saidie Bently sat on a hassock at her feet, a brown buffalo robe wrapped around her. Lucy Graves was on the front seat with Erastus and his younger brother Winthrop, and Robin hung on to the side of the car, whistling, "It's a long way to Tipperary."

Barbara had gone on with Johnny Gray in his cutter with his horse Bumble. The motor overtook them and there was a wild salute, of motor horn, laughter, and

greeting. Johnny waved his whip in return, and Barbara her gold silk scarf.

"How we shall miss Robin," she commented as the sleigh slid lightly over the crisp snow. That is what they had all said since they had known of his intended departure; "How we shall miss Robin!"

Johnny nodded. He and Robin had been chums for years.

"You know how I feel. I believe you feel the same way, yourself. Doesn't it seem to you as though nothing ever could or ever would happen to us?" Barbara swallowed a sob as she spoke.

Johnny nodded again and they drove on in silence for a few minutes, the jangle of the sleigh bells being the only sound in the clear air.

"You're the one who ought to go, Johnny," Barbara said suddenly and almost fiercely. "Robin never even thought of Europe until Miss Meadows said she wanted a boy that night at Aunt Comfort's."

"Robin Ward's smile would get him anywhere on earth," she went on. "You've planned, well not really planned, of course, but you've dreamed about going. You and Mehitable used to talk about it for hours at a time."

"Robin's the one to go now, though, I guess. He will be more of a help to Miss Meadows than I should be," Johnny answered honestly, adding after a moment, "Perhaps our turn will come some day. Just think of it, Barbara, we've never been more than a three hours' journey from Cherryville."

"Perhaps," Barbara answered the first part of Johnny's remark skeptically and then added: "Mine

never will. I'll always be just here. All the rest of you will go away, but I'll always stay. I haven't minded it so much until to-day." Barbara stopped with a sob, and although Johnny gave her a sympathetic glance, there was a twinkle in his eye. He knew something that Barbara did not know, and his unselfish friendship for her made him glad.

They drove up to the gray farmhouse with a jangle of sleigh bells and were greeted with cries of welcome. The boys had built a roaring fire in the wide fireplace of Mrs. Stebbins' dining room. The good lady herself greeted Barbara and Johnny with, "Come in and welcome," then gave a few last touches to the table with its white cloth and its tempting array of glasses filled with celery, jelly, and pickles, before calling them all to come to partake of her good things.

They all drank Robin's health in sweet, nut-brown cider made by Mrs. Stebbins, and they did ample justice to the scalloped oysters, potato salad, and hot rolls.

"It's so good of you not to have cold turkey, Mrs. Stebbins," Johnny said to her as she passed him the bake disk filled with hot oysters, for the second time. "I feel as though I never wanted to see another turkey again, the day after Thanksgiving."

"Or mince pie, or cranberry sauce, or any of the 'fixins,'" put in Robin.

"You'll sing another song before long, or I miss my guess, Robin Ward," remarked Ruby. "You'll long for just plain bread and butter and apple sauce."

There was a moment's silence after this dire

prophecy of Ruby's. Then Lucy Graves said, "We'll send you boxes of good things, anyway."

Amy Ward turned to Barbara, who sat at one side of her. "It's all one big lark to Robin," she said.

So it seemed. He was the gayest of the gay. His brown eyes sparkled with the fun and excitement of the moment and in vague anticipation of the adventures that lay before him. He eyed the steaming Indian pudding for which Mrs. Stebbins was famous, with great satisfaction, and pretended that Barbara's cake was a great surprise.

"It was meant to be a surprise, but you always find out everything, Robin Ward," reproached Barbara.

Robin stood up suddenly and lifting his glass of cider, said, "I propose a toast to *Mehitable*."

"Hear! Hear!" they all cried, rising with him, even Dick Putnam who had come to town since *Mehitable's* departure and knew her only by name.

Barbara blinked the tears from her eyes. Later when she was one-stepping with Robin, she tried to tell him something of all she would have him say to *Mehitable* for her. She wondered that he hesitated, or rather that he did not seem to enter more eagerly into her mood. As they stood by the fire a moment, while she fastened the ribbon about her "fairy princess hair," as *Mehitable* had called it, he said soberly, and it was the only time she had known him to be solemn in all the years of their acquaintance: "I hope I'll see *Mehitable*, of course, but we can't promise anything, you know. We're not going over to see our friends. We're going to be on the job."

When Robin spoke like that, Barbara knew that

Amy Ward must be wrong in her conclusions. He knew at any rate that they were going for work, but neither he nor the group of happy, careless, old-time friends in Mrs. Stebbins' farmhouse knew what all of this work would be.

Johnny took Dick Putnam to his uncle's house a few miles farther on, when they left, so Barbara drove back in the motor with the others. Robin still rode on the running board and they talked back and forth to him excitedly. He left them at the corner of the main street, running toward a wide, brown house where his family were impatiently awaiting his coming for the last home supper he would have for many a day. Amy followed him, not quite catching up with him before he reached the step. They both stood for a moment waving, then the front door opened, and Robin's mother stood in the doorway.

They were all to meet at the station at quarter to twelve. Barbara's father was out of town for a few days, and Ruby Bently was staying with her, and Ruby was now very mysterious. Mystery being so foreign to her nature, even Barbara noticed it.

"Why do you keep smiling to yourself, Ruby? You look perfectly ridiculous," remarked Barbara as the two girls sat side by side on the sofa in Barbara's bedroom. They had made some hot chocolate and had had a cozy hour talking over the party at the Stebbins' farm and the approaching departure. "I don't see anything to smile about. Robin isn't at all sure that he will see Mehitable. He could hardly go up to Cluthers to see her. I don't imagine he'd have a very

cordial welcome from Madame." Barbara laughed, and Ruby followed her example.

"I wonder what on earth Robin will say about us all, if he does see her. I hope he will remember some of the things I've told him to say," said Ruby.

"Well, he won't," Barbara returned. "He will say anything that he makes up on the spur of the moment. I've told him to tell Mehitable how much more grown-up I am, but he only grins and won't promise that he will."

"It's almost time to start, Barbara. Do take off that dress and put on your blue coat and skirt. I've changed into mine." Ruby jumped off the sofa and went over to Barbara's dressing table where she began to powder her nose.

"What is the use?" objected Barbara. "I can wear my heavy coat just as I did this afternoon."

"Oh, we may want to have some fun after the train goes. Winthrop Peters spoke of our all going to their house for a chafing-dish supper," Ruby returned, with what she considered a sudden inspiration.

It was true that Winthrop had suggested an impromptu party to console them all for Robin's departure, but Ruby knew that Barbara would be speeding away in the train with Miss Meadows and Robin, for a week's fun in New York. She wanted Barbara not to know it herself until the exciting moment should arrive, the time agreed upon by them all as being the most thrilling moment for her to know, and that was just before the train should pull in!

Barbara consented to put on her new gray suit, and gray and green Russian blouse, and both the girls were

ready when a gay voice hailed them from the front steps.

"The tears are making an awful thaw!"

The voice was Robin's and they ran down the steps to join him and a noisy laughing group on the sidewalk.

"Robin really should have gone in the motor with Auntie and Uncle, but the crowd came along and insisted on his walking," Amy Ward said to Lucy Graves who was very quiet, and did not reply.

Ruby had had a whispered consultation with Johnny Gray who disappeared suddenly and whom they did not see again until they were all waiting on the station platform. The gayety of their walk down the snowy, wide, main street had lessened, and, except for an occasional laughing comment, they were quiet. This was partly due to the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Ward were a part of their group, and that Miss Meadows took up some of the last minutes with practical questions to Robin about his baggage. Miss Meadows had had a two days' visit with Miss Webster, who, not approving in the least the "wild goose" idea of Robin's going to Europe, had not come to the station. Robin had run in to say good-by to her and Desire, had patted Patchwork's head, and promised to see *Mehitable* as soon as he could.

A whistle sounded faintly in the distance. Mrs. Ward put both her arms around Robin's neck and put her head down on his shoulder. Ruby touched Barbara's arm.

"Read this," she commanded, putting a piece of folded paper in Barbara's hands. She opened the note and read.

"Dear Daughter,

"No one is more pleased than your daddy at the prospect of a week's pleasure for you in New York. Go with Miss Meadows and Robin, and enjoy it to the full. Black Mandy will take care of me until you return next week. Daddy."

"Why—what—I——"

The train puffed into the station. Johnny touched her arm.

"Read your note? I have your suitcase. Follow Miss Meadows and don't let me hear you say again that nothing ever happens to you!"

The next minute she found herself on the platform of the train, her friends laughing up at her, Miss Meadows' arm protectingly around her. She was too confused and amazed to do more than stand silently.

"Good-by, Robin! Good-by! Be a good boy. Sorry for you, Miss Meadows. Keep him in order if you can."

Then the train pulled away, and after it was well out of the station, the three still standing there on the platform, heard—

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow—
And so say all of us!"

CHAPTER VI

MEHITABLE HEARS OF MARGOT

"THESE paths certainly wind through the gorse, Mehitable, but I don't quite see why you said *gleaming* in your poem. *Prickly* would have been more to the point." Tip glanced over her shoulder at Mehitable.

"'Paths that wind through the gleaming gorse, wandering on to the far-away,'" sang Noel, who was just ahead of them. "I've made up a tune for that. Who knows, I may become a great composer and set all your poems for you, Mehitable." Noel sat down on a rising bit of ground, throwing her blue hat with its blue and white band on to the spike of a bristly clump of gorse.

"Don't tell me you two have given out already! It's a mile still, before we come to the tarn!" Tip stopped in front of Noel, and turning, eyed Mehitable who had sunk down on a rock, reproachfully. "You two are no sports, I'll say," she commented.

"What is the sense of rushing? We have the whole afternoon before us. Let's enjoy it," Mehitable answered lazily.

"This is as far as I can go, Tip. I must write mother this afternoon." There was a look of anxiety on Noel's face.

"You're too good to be true. Well, I'm going back

with you. I've built an oven by the tarn and I'm going to work a miracle on cook and come back with a bag of potatoes and some salt. I'll meet you at the tarn, *Mehitable*. You stroll, so I'll catch up with you probably," said Tip, catching Noel's arm to help her up.

"You'll be ages going all the way back and fussing around the kitchen. *Mehitable* will be all alone," objected Noel.

Tip laughed. "*Jehoshephat*, woman, when you're better acquainted with our friend, Miss Webster, you'll find there's nothing she adores more than being able to moon a little. She likes to think us all over and there is no one"—Tip paused impressively, speaking with mock solemnity—"there is no one here who comes before the moor in her estimation. She's devoted to the tarn. It has cut us all out completely. We don't stand a chance alongside of it." Tip had started back, and said over her shoulders, "There is only one person that *Mehitable* loves better than the tarn, and she is not here." Then she went on down the path and Noel followed her, with a backward wave of the hand for *Mehitable*.

Mehitable sat still for a little while after her friends had left her. She was reading the "*Chevalier de Maison Rouge*" and had brought it along with her, but she let it lie idly in her lap and sat looking across the shadowed stillness of the moor. She was sorry that Noel had not stayed with them on the only holiday afternoon of the week, but Tip was right; she loved the thrill of being alone there on the moor. She watched the retreating forms of her two friends. Noel

would be sure to write a long, careful letter, in her straight, even writing, to her mother. "She's so sure, so trustable," thought Mehitable, and then she sighed. Una worried her. Her moods were becoming difficult to deal with. She jumped up suddenly as though to shake off worrying thoughts, and started to wend her way slowly toward the tarn. As she walked, pausing now and then to look off at the vast stretches of the moor, she thought of the first time she had seen it, that bright September day when they had all come to Cluthers. The beauty of it had bewildered her, had almost terrified her. The purple and crimson and gold had dazzled her. Now the color had faded, the gorse bushes had lost their tips of sunshine, and the vivid splashes of scarlet and rose had faded to brown and silver, to amethyst and mauve. "It was splendid before, but now it's—enchancing. It was proud and laughing and impudent. Now I think that it is sad. It is as though it had loved something very much and lost it. It is tender and understanding," Mehitable thought, as she stood, a solitary figure in the space and silence.

She was walking uphill now, farther into the heart of the moor. Now and then she heard a sudden, sharp rustle in the bracken and knew that some wild things were skeltering from her footsteps. A brown rabbit scurried past her. "You'd look like the rabbit in 'Alice in Wonderland' if you were white. You hurry just as he did," she said out loud, smiling to herself. Talking to a wild rabbit in the heart of a Yorkshire moor was one of the "different" things that had come into her life.

Wild things, they were everywhere. Shivering birds had flown south at the first touch of frost, but the moor still held a throbbing wonder of live things in its heart.

When she reached the top of the path, she shut her eyes, walked a few steps to a big boulder, passed it, still with closed eyes, then opened them suddenly.

Cuplike, the moor held its treasure. Bronze and gray, gold and brown and mauve loveliness had wrought itself, mosaic like, into a goblet to hold the tarn which brimmed in silver stillness to its edge. The tarn—Mehitable held her breath, clasping and unclasping her hands, as she stood looking into it. There was not a ripple on the water. She came close to the rim and, leaning over, peered down into the depths where her face looked back at her. "My eyes are frightened," she thought.

She walked slowly around the edge of the tarn, its mystery touching her now as always, with the touch of a loved hand. As she walked, she breathed in the sweetness all about her. It was a rare afternoon tucked in between storms, a day of autumn fragrance. She thought of Tip's laughing remark, as she turned away with Noel. "There is only one person whom Mehitable loves better than the tarn, and she is not here!" Tip meant Young Madame, the friend that had come upon Mehitable sobbing in the hollow of the old tree by the wall at the Château, had found her in deep misery and had given her something of the mother love that she had never known before. Young Madame was a Red Cross Nurse in France. Mehitable felt a sudden longing to go to her and to help, by her side,

in the war that was tearing at the heart of Europe. "That's what I could have done in a story. It's only real life that's stodgy, as Una calls it. Nan was right. I do long to go, but because of Aunt Comfort and being so young, and everything and everybody—I can't. All right, there's no use grumbling. I've got the tarn!"

She looked off in the direction of Cluthers. There was no sign, as yet, of Tip. How like her to think about a picnic when it was too late. It was wonderful, being there alone, the most enchanting thing she could know. There was no living thing but herself there by the limpid, cold blue depths of the tarn. The sun had disappeared temporarily behind the rapidly glided edges of a bank of dark clouds. Beyond her was a vast stretch of moorland, mysterious because unknown. It was a fortnight since Madame had given permission for them to come out alone on the moor. This was the first time Mehitable had come alone to the tarn. Its silver changed to blackness, as the sun vanished. She sat down at its edge, folding her hands about her knees, thinking deeply. Life to Mehitable was of such intense interest, that when she began to think about it, the thoughts crowded fast upon each other. That afternoon by the tarn she was thinking of the past week at Cluthers, of the attic room where they loved to go and where José Blanc had so suddenly come upon them. "Well, I'm through!" Fanny Trent had remarked to Una and to her the night after the encounter with José in the attic. "I've tried to be nice to that girl. I've offered her Huylers, asked her to my room, grinned at her to show I was friendly and

now I'm through. I guess she's hopeless. She doesn't want to make friends with any of us."

Mehitable pondered Fanny's words as she sat by the tarn. Was there not something back of all this strangeness about José, something more than her sorrow at leaving her home and her anxiety for her uncle who was fighting with the Belgian army? She looked down into the water. "It looks like a fairy tarn. I wish it could answer questions," she thought, smiling at herself at the absurdity. Then she glanced up and saw José.

José had come from behind a piece of rising ground on the other side of the tarn. She saw Mehitable, paused, then came toward her. Mehitable smiled as José came up to her, and patted the ground beside her. "Won't you sit down and talk a few minutes, José? Tip Manders has gone to Cluthers to try and tease cook for some tea things. She won't be back for a half hour or so."

José sat down beside Mehitable, her back against a jutting piece of rock. They were so close to the tarn that they could see their faces reflected on its smooth surface. José sat with her hands folded lightly in her lap, her gray cape falling back from her shoulders. She had been walking quickly, and she put her head sideways against the rock with a gesture of fatigue. Mehitable was so surprised at José's sudden act of friendliness in sitting beside her that she could not think of anything to say except, "You're tired. Have you been far?"

José nodded. "Yes, it is good to walk. I do not think so much when I am walking quickly." She spoke

in her quick, concise way, her cold, unemotional voice cutting the soft air crisply.

"It's wonderful to think. I mean, I love it more than anything." Mehitable was sorry after she had spoken, feeling that she had said a tactless thing. José did not want to think. She had just intimated as much.

José spoke again, shortly, "I must think, whether I wish to or not."

"You've been 'beyond,' haven't you, José? That's what I call the moor on the other side of the tarn. It seems so mysterious and almost frightening. Some day when I've time I'm going to wander there for a long way," Mehitable went on.

José nodded. "Yes, I like it best of all where it is lonely. There is much that I must decide in my mind, and it is best that I be away by myself." José looked off at the listening moorland.

"Yes, it's good to be away even from your best friends sometimes," Mehitable answered, and then again felt the tactlessness of her remark. She leaned forward and put her hand impulsively on José arm. "How could I have said that? It shows how thoughtless I am. Couldn't you tell me, José, wouldn't it help to tell some one just a little of the way you feel?"

There was only silence for answer, and Mehitable went on speaking rapidly, nervously. "I was so lonely when I first came to the Château in Paris, I've felt that I knew so well how it must all seem to you here." Mehitable paused for breath and something in her honest, impulsive way of speaking made José say

slowly, hesitatingly, "Perhaps I can tell you, *Mehitable*."

Even in this interesting moment, *Mehitable* felt a thrill at hearing her name pronounced in the same charming way that Philippe de Villiers, Madame's grandson, pronounced it. She wisely said nothing more, but waited for José to speak again, trying to figure out in her mind how long it would be before Tip and the others would be coming.

José sat looking off at the shining water. The sun had appeared from behind the clouds, and a great wave of heather-scented air swept over them.

"My uncle is fighting now. He went at once, as soon as war was declared. He was not with us when the siege came. We lived near the city on an estate which has been a long time in our family. Margot and I were happy there, even after uncle left. We were happy just in being together. Margot is my little sister. She is fourteen, two years younger than I."

"Your little sister," *Mehitable* repeated after her.

"Perhaps it will be easier, as you say. Yes, I will tell you. You have a soul that can comprehend. I felt that when first I saw you. I never thought that I could tell any one here, that I could endure it to tell." José leaned forward, touching *Mehitable* lightly with her hand. "My little sister, Margot, is lost," she said quietly.

"Lost!" exclaimed *Mehitable*. What was this that José was saying to her? She turned and faced the Belgian girl, her eyes wide with amazement. "Oh—José," she faltered.

José still sat with her hands folded in her lap, and

there was little emotion apparent in the white stillness of her face, but as she went on speaking there was a quiver in her voice.

"Uncle sent word for us to leave our home, and we went to the city, to Antwerp, with friends, and stayed with them at an inn. It was all confusion, there are no words to tell you of what it was like when we found that we actually had to leave the city, but we did leave it, all of us together, Madame Gardoux and her children and servants, and Margot and I." José wrung her hands together in her lap. It was a dramatic gesture and it somehow emphasized her being foreign. Then after a moment she went on speaking. "How can I tell you of the night that we left Antwerp, the terror, the crowds—Mehitable, the crowds! There is only one thing that seemed really to have happened. The rest is only a strange thing, what shall I say, a nightmare. But this one thing—Margot was lost—that is all that I can seem to think about."

Mehitable leaned forward, resting her two hands on the stones and looking up intently at José. She did not speak and after a moment the Belgian girl said slowly, "It is impossible to tell you how it happened. One minute we were together, and the next she was gone, yes, gone. We shall never know how, but suddenly, somehow, quite a long way from the town, in the roads, she disappeared. The people, ah, the crowds, Mehitable, the children and the livestock, the screaming, the confusion."

"She just disappeared!" Mehitable gasped softly, scarcely believing that such a thing could be, yet knowing well what José meant when she spoke of crowds.

children crying, and animals in confusion, for she herself had escaped from a Belgian village with Philippe de Villiers in a motor, and a little of the terror of that time had come close to her. Still, José's sister disappearing! Why, it seemed like some oldtime story of adventure, some wild romance. She was gone, and they did not know where to look for her. It was maddening. Small wonder that José was almost distracted and that she shrank from their careless fun.

"Yes," José was answering. "She—we cannot tell how—one instant she was there and the next—gone!" José put out her hands with a hopeless gesture. "I was like a wild thing, do you know, Mehitable. We searched all night. I did not seem to live or breathe, I only looked and looked and called and prayed."

"José!" It was all that Mehitable could say.

"People, people, they were everywhere. She was swallowed up in their midst. She was so little, was my Margot!" José put her hands over her eyes suddenly, but when she took them away again there was no sign of tears.

Mehitable took both of José hands and held them tight. She did not speak for a minute, but José knew that her sympathy was there. It showed in her face and eyes.

"They said she must have been forced onward by the great crowds and that we must press on after her. We did not know what to do. We did not find her farther on, or anywhere. We have never had any trace of her. I was a month at Folkestone looking among the refugees. People have tried to help me. They have been kind, but she is gone, little Margot is

gone. I am here because my uncle finally got three days' leave and came to me at Folkestone. He made me come here though I begged him to let me stay. I implored him. He said that one was enough, that he must know that I was safe and being cared for. He is doing all that he can to find Margot, but he is on active service at the front. He must trust in others to search for him. How I begged them to let me go back to Belgium. It was of no use. My uncle said that I must be brave, and—what is it that the English say—'do my bit!' José bowed her head again, and the long braid of pale gold hair fell across her shoulder.

There were voices in the distance and the sound of Tip's laugh. José was on her feet in an instant. "I'll not see them. I'll go," she said fiercely.

Mehitable stood up and caught José hands. "You've told me, José. I never can thank you enough for trusting me. May I tell the others? They would so love to comfort you, if they could," she said.

"No, I cannot bear to have them talking of it. No, no. You are my friend, Mehitable. I have told you my sorrow, just you, not the others. Keep my sorrow close in your heart," José answered.

"They would all be your friends, if you would let them." Before Mehitable had finished the sentence, José was gone, and the next instant the girls, Tip and Una, had reached the top of the knoll.

"Did you think we were never coming? Well, we're here at last, and my dear, we didn't bag a thing. Cook was out somewhere and everything's locked up tighter than a knot. Fan donated some biscuits and that's all

there is. No bacon nor nothing. Ain't it awful." Tip danced around the tarn, while Una and Mehitable sat down at the edge of the rocks.

"I say, Mehitable, your freckles fairly dance, and you're as white as a ghost. What's the trouble, aroon? I know, it's this old tarn that you're always talking about. I don't believe it's at all a good thing for you. It makes you dream too much," Una said severely.

"I wish it could make dreams come true, Una," Mehitable answered her.

CHAPTER VII

LANGFRAI

"OLD BACKBOW gave me the post bag when I met him coming up the drive. I'm going to give out the letters, so you'd all better be nice to me," Peg shouted across the veranda to a group of girls coming toward her from the tennis court. They were Tip, Noel, Nancy, and Mehitable, and at sight of the mail bag they started to run and were beside Peg before she had time to elude them.

"Whoever said you could give out the letters? Really, you have the nerve, Peg O'Hara!" exclaimed Tip. "Come now," she went on, "no nonsense. We happen to be very fond of getting mail, here at beastly old Cluthers, and we are not going to be teased about it by a youngster like you. Hand the bag over, *instantly*."

Peg laughed gleefully, backing quickly away and dodging behind a bench. "There are two with the dear old Cherryville postmark for Mehitable. Doesn't she wish she had them, though!"

"Peg!" Mehitable began reproachfully, but finished with a laugh as Peg tossed her two letters. She opened the first one eagerly and read it through on her way to the house. It was from Miss Meadows and had been written and posted at Cherryville! She

bumped into Fanny Trent, who was also deeply engrossed in a letter from home, and finally sat down on the edge of the schoolroom platform and re-read the news that made her give a sudden whoop, as Una came and sat down beside her, saying,

"Whatever is the matter, Mehitable? You Americans seem to be up in the air over your post to-day. I had a stupid letter from poor old Winchy, and that was all."

"Dear old Winchy, I'd like to see her," Mehitable said absently. She looked up at Una, her eyes aglow with excitement. "Listen! What do you think? Miss Meadows is sailing this week, and, my dear, she's bringing Robin Ward with her."

Una, who knew all of Mehitable's Cherryville friends by name, was all interest. "Read it to me, Mehitable. I adore your Cherryville letters, but this is Miss Meadows—all the better. She's a dear." Una put her arm about Mehitable's shoulder and listened to the letter. All about them was the laughter and chattering of the others, and the lunch gong sounded before Mehitable had finished the first paragraph.

"That's always the way here. We never get interested in reading or discussing anything but what that beastly gong sounds. I'm hungry, so I don't mind so much. Bring the letter with you and read it during lunch," exclaimed Una, as they made their way toward the dining room.

"It's absurd. Well, not that, of course, but Robin Ward, of all people on earth. Why, Una, I can't believe it's true. Robin actually coming here!" Me-

hitable ejaculated as they sat down at their places in the dining room.

"Here!" repeated Una with a loud laugh, in which Mehitable joined. The thought of Robin Ward at Cluthers was too funny for words.

"Una and Mehitable, you are the noisiest girls in this school," commented Miss Derk in her cool, even tones from the head of the table.

"She said the same to Audrey and me the other day. Poor Derk, she certainly enjoys putting in a word here and there," whispered Tip, as she helped herself to mustard, and raised her eyebrows despairingly at the sight of boiled bacon and cabbage.

Una was talking so fast and so intensely to Mehitable that she did not hear what Tip said at all. Mehitable was telling some of the contents of Miss Meadows' letter, and Una had interrupted eagerly.

"She actually invites us, Mehitable, and we simply are going, that's all there is to it. We must and shall go and, for goodness sake, don't have that worried look on your face. You're terribly New England, you know, Mehitable, you really are. The idea of your being anything but wildly excited over this and sure that you'll go! Why, of course, you—we—will. It's glorious, just to think about it!"

"Una, you haven't heard the letter. Miss Meadows says that Aunt Comfort was very much upset at the idea of my coming up to London. She's afraid to have me come, and she told Miss Meadows that she'd have to come here to see me!" Mehitable spoke dolefully. She was as excited as Una at the thought of

going to London, but she felt that the chances of their actually going were slim indeed.

Una spoke confidently. "Nonsense, *Mehitable*! Of course we'll go, sometime during the holidays. Oh, London! How I long to be there. How I long to help. *Mehitable* wouldn't it be splendid if we could find some war work to do, and stay on in town!" Una waved aside a dish of potatoes which the maid passed to her, and sat deep in thought for the rest of the meal, except to make an occasional comment on bits of Miss Meadows' letter, which was read to her between bites of bacon and potato.

"We'll go. Nothing can keep us," was Una's comment.

She took her friend's arm as they came out of the dining room. "We'll talk it all over to-night. You're not to be tiresome, *Mehitable*. We'll go, of course! Fancy, you'll see a *Cherryville* friend and can talk with him. I want to meet Robin more than any of the others!" she said enthusiastically. "Why, oh, why, do I have to have that stupid violin lesson on a half holiday? It's sickening," she added.

"There'll be plenty of time to talk it all over," *Mehitable* answered with a sarcasm which was lost on Una.

"Not too much. The holidays will be here before you know it," Una called over her shoulder, as she hurried away.

Mehitable went to the cloak room and took down her new dark blue sport coat, picked up her blue tam from the shelf and went quickly and quietly out the side garden door. She wanted to be alone, and it was

not an easy thing to accomplish. She was thankful that the music supervisor who came all the way from Leeds every five weeks should have happened to arrive on a holiday, for she did not want to hear Una say anything more about their going to London, and she wanted, as José had said to her by the tarn a week ago, to "decide in her mind."

It was Thanksgiving Day, and she had awakened with a great longing to be at home in Cherryville. It had grown as the day progressed and after reading Miss Meadows' letter and a short note from Barbara, it was big enough to fill the schoolroom, all of Cluthers, and "almost the moor itself," she thought as she ran swiftly across the vegetable gardens, on out to the great welcoming stretch of land which lay before her.

She had been excited over Miss Meadows' letter and deeply interested in Barbara's, but her spirits sank again when she realized that the chance of her going to London was a small one. Aunt Comfort had refused to write the letter to Madame, giving her consent to the visit to Miss Meadows. She had not yet recovered from the shock of hearing of Mehitable's and Philippe's adventure in leaving Belgium, and she was only too glad that her niece was safely settled in the school in Yorkshire.

So Robin was coming with Miss Meadows. It had all been decided in the twinkling of an eye. Mehitable opened Barbara's note and re-read the hastily written lines which told of Robin's good fortune.

"Robin came in with a bag of hickory nuts when we were all sitting around the fire. He was covered

with snow and his eyes were shining the way they always do in a snowstorm. Miss Meadows took to him right away, and asked him if he'd go with her, almost the first thing. It was all in fun then, of course, but I felt that she really meant what she said, and she did. She went to see the Wards this morning and they've given their consent. I know Johnny thought just as I did last night, that Robin really would go. He went down cellar for apples and when he came back, he looked almost as though he'd been crying, but don't you ever dare to tell him I said so. I can't believe that Robin's going to see you, Mehitable. It's just too wonderful to be true. He will see you but he won't be able to tell you all I want you to know."

Mehitable was so deep in thought as she walked along that she hardly knew where she was going. She was thinking deeply of Barbara. "She misses me more than I do her. I've had new things to do and see and think about from the very first, and she's just had the Bently twins and getting supper for her father and high school with chalky Mr. Peck teaching Latin. And I've had the ocean, and the Château, Una, Philippe, Young Madame, and so many things." It was not a question of one loving more than the other; it was only that so much had been added for Mehitable.

She was a long time in reaching the tarn. When she saw the faint shining of its water, she hurried her steps, and when she came up to it, she knelt down close to the edge, gazing deep into its silent depths, the way she so loved to do. When she stood up, shaking her

braid over her shoulder, she made up her mind to go "beyond," to see for herself the mystery of the deeper moorland.

The moor seemed to be listening. There was no sound of any kind. Even the curlews were still, and a rook who flew close beside *Mehitable*, as she walked, turned back toward *Cluthers*, without so much as a good-by croak. *Mehitable* knew that it was easy to lose oneself on the moor. *Backbow* had said so, but she went on and on, over the springing bracken. Unknown mysteries lay beyond her. She was sure of that. It was breath-taking, the fascination of it all. Now and then sharp eyes peered at her from the brush. She was alone with the little wild things of the moor.

She went swiftly through the still, sweet air, on and on. She felt as though she could never stop and she did not wish to do so. She did not feel at all like a New England girl, a schoolgirl who even at seventeen wore her hair in a braid, and who still was as much in awe of her Aunt Comfort as she had been at ten. She felt rather as though she were a part of the moor, close to its secrets, longing to know its treasures, to talk to it.

She knew that she had come a very long way, but she kept on, realizing suddenly that the ground raised a little, and that she was going up the side of a heather hill. Below her stretched low-lying wastes of bracken and heather. Sharp crags jutted out from the hillside and far off she saw the slow-moving figures of goats browsing on other hills in the vast world of faded gorse, of purple-black mounds and valleys, of gray and bronze sweeps of rising ground.

She never quite knew just the minute when she realized that she was not alone. It seemed to her afterward as though the knowledge came to her before she saw the boy. He was standing on one of the limestone crags, or rather in a niche between two of them. He was so still that he seemed a part of the silence and strangeness. He wore rough trousers of goatskin, and a gray shirt. His head was thrown back as though he were listening, his shaggy hair blazing in the gray rocks, bronze and brown and red, it seemed to have caught all of the ever changing colors of the moorland.

Mehitable felt something that was not fear, something more akin to awe. Who was this sentinel of the rocks? He did not move so much as an eyelash. The arm and hand which he held straight out at his side, even with his shoulder, did not quiver. It was as though the spirit of the moorland had taken the shape of that motionless figure, poised in the cleft of the rocks.

There was a sudden, almost noiseless flutter of wings, a swift darting through the air, and the next moment a bird, a golden hawk, flew to the boy's arm and poised there, ready, in an instant, for startled flight, its wings blending with the tawny golden-brown of the bracken, and the tousled head of the boy.

Mehitable watched, fascinated, but her foot moved and a pebble from under her shoe rolled along the path. With an upward flutter, the bird was gone!

The boy turned instantly, and there leaped into his eyes a look, not so much of anger, as of fear. He turned toward her. "Who art tha?" he asked.

She answered him literally, "Mehitable Webster. Who are you?"

He glanced back in the direction from which she had come, and she followed his gaze. There was nothing behind them but the sweep of the moor and the smiling sky.

"I'm alone," she said to reassure him, feeling instinctively that a dread of any one's coming after her was in his backward glance. "I love to come off on the moor alone. I love it almost more than anything in the world."

He gave Mehitable a long look, and, as though satisfied, spoke impulsively. "No one has seen my home. It is not like other places." There was a touch of mystery in his words. He continued, shyly, "I will take tha to it, but tha must promise that it shall be a secret between us!"

Mehitable nodded. "Yes," she answered quickly, "yes, I promise."

He still looked at her, and the look was more that of a frightened field rabbit than of a boy. Then he turned suddenly, saying, "It is a narrow way. I must go first. Tha can follow me." His speech was slow and a little halting as though he seldom spoke to any one but animals. There was a faint suggestion of Yorkshire brogue, but except for his saying "tha" for you, his English was quite perfect. Mehitable followed him, excited and captivated. This was one of the "different" things, one that she had never dreamed could be.

It was a difficult descent that they made, and several times the boy turned and held out his brown hand

to help her. It was steep and rocky. Now and then they came to huge boulders, and farther down to chalk cliffs, which jutted out like huge, grotesque figures among the heather. The boy wound in and out among them and then descended a curving path which brought them to a sudden, amazing hollow, where cliffs were above them and around them. The boy ran on ahead of her and paused at the foot of one of them, looking back at her, his hands against the rough sides of the white, fortresslike cave.

"This is my home. Come in and see," he said. His wild appearance was in such contrast to the gentle courtesy of his voice that it added to his charm, making him seem different in all ways from any one that she ever had known.

She hesitated as he stood by, to let her through at the cave opening. "Are you sure that you want a visitor?"

"Th'art welcome," he answered, and followed her inside. The interior of the cave made a fairly good-sized room. A pile of rugs in one corner evidently served as a couch. Langfrai had made a fireplace out of one end of the cave, a hole through the cliff acting as an outlet for the smoke. The fireplace was, in reality, a deep hollow in the cliff. It was piled high with fagots. A box of matches and a candle stood on a table, made of boards roughly nailed together, near it. The boy touched a match to the fagots and a moment later they had the welcome of a bright blaze.

The boy drew a bench up to the fire and said to Mehitabel, "Sit down, please, and I will make tha a

cup of tea." The bench was made of boards nailed together, like the table, and there was no other furniture of any kind in the cave room. There was a row of books in a niche of the rock and after he had lighted a couple of candles and was busy bringing in a bucket of fresh spring water and counting out three spoonfuls of tea for his green teapot, *Mehitable* went over to the books and, leaning over, studied their names. There were six books of varying sizes, shabbily covered, and evidently much read. *Mehitable* smiled delightedly at the sight of old favorites. "The Wide, Wide World," of all strange books for this strange boy to care about. "David Copperfield," "The Crock of Gold," "A Flower of Old Japan," "Cyrano de Bergerac," and a bright blue and gold copy of "L'Aiglon." These last two were in French and she opened them eagerly, turning to speak as the boy came up to the fire, kettle in hand. "I'm looking at your books. Do you mind? I'm reading 'Cyrano,' too. You love books, don't you? You must, because you brought them all this way!" As she said the last words, *Mehitable* felt how odd they sounded. "All this way! From where? Who was this boy, and where did he come from?"

He told her while they had their tea, she on the bench and he sitting cross-legged on the floor, close to the fire. Although there was restlessness and a certain exaggeration in his way of speaking, there was, at the same time, wistfulness. *Mehitable* sat with the copy of "Cyrano" on the bench beside her, her teacup in her hand, listening between sips of fragrant beverage.

"My name is Langfrai Muir. I've lived here a year and a half. Father died three years ago. I've lived on the edge of this moor most of my life. After he died, I went to live with cousins in Glasgow. I hated them. They were shut-in people. They never went outside the dingy town. Oh, I can't tell tha. No one understands. I had to be free. I wanted only the moors. I was dependent on those people for my bread and yet I hated them. So one night I ran away. I put my books, some of them, in a bag, along with a sack of flour and the kettle and tin cups. I did up some bacon and a box of sugar and my brush and comb in the rugs and slung them on my back. I know these moors, wild as they are, every inch of them. I knew the cliffs and that they are not visited. It's too boggy just beyond and there's no straight walking for several miles to the north. They don't shoot this way. I've lived here quite easily. Oh, I love it, the wind howling through the crevices and the foxes barking in the night." Langfrai stopped suddenly and looked across at Mehitable, astonishment in his eyes. "I'm telling tha all this and I've never seen tha before! But I knew right away I liked tha. I always know. I must have known tha wert different"—he hesitated, suddenly confused—"I mean, tha wert so far off on the moor. People don't generally come so far. Then tha's wanting to see my home. Well, I'm glad tha came," he finished simply.

"That was what I felt, too. I mean, I liked you, too. You seemed so different from Madame and the governesses and Cluthers. I'm at school on the edge of the moor. Cluthers is the name of the house. I

come from Cherryville, Vermont." Mehitable met Langfrai's eyes and they both laughed and their laughter sealed their friendship.

This was the real adventure, almost the greatest. There could never be another like that of fleeing in a motor car from Belgium, with Philippe de Villiers, but that had held tragedy in its heart, and this was all delight. She could not stay for a moment longer. A sudden awful thought that it was tea time, then, and that she was miles from Cluthers, seized her. Langfrai was speaking.

"Tell me about what tha does. Doesn't tha hate being cooped up in school? Tha loves poetry? Perhaps some day tha wilt write it. I never met an American girl before. I was only fifteen and a half when I ran away. I've never seen any girls since. I know about the war. I've one friend who sees me sometimes, but not here. I've my gun and there is fair game all about. I have a few books and—I have the moor." He said the last almost reverently, and Mehitable repeated after him, "Yes, the moor." Then she got down off the bench and came up to the fire. Langfrai sprang to his feet. "Tha'rt not going now, art tha—does tha mind if I say it?—Mehitable?"

"Why, it's like really having a friend, a new one. Yes, call me Mehitable. I'm never called anything else except Mademoiselle Webster by Madame, when she is angry. Oh, I wish I could stay and talk a little longer. There are so many things I'd like to know about your life. Why, it's different from anything I've ever heard of. You out there all alone in the storms

and wind, but I mustn't stay another second. I may be in a great scrape because of this, going so far and being late for tea."

Langfrai frowned. "I could not be glad if I thought tha would have trouble over this. I will see tha well on the way." They crossed the room together and came out into the pale light of late afternoon.

They walked quickly and when they were once on the wide, straight sweep of the moor which led toward Cluthers, they fairly flew. And all the time they talked. Langfrai knew the way to Cluthers without being told, and Mehitable remembered what he said. "I know every inch of these moors." He stopped short at the tarn. "Tha wilt not be able to lose the way. It's straight ahead. I trust tha to keep the secret of my home. Tell me, are we not friends?" He nodded his own head vigorously before she could reply. "It has been good meeting tha. I am glad," he said, holding out his hand.

"I'm glad, too, Langfrai. I never thought this morning I should make a new friend before night. Could I bring some books for you? I could hide them in the rocks, there by the knoll, you know, at the end of the tarn." Mehitable spoke eagerly.

Langfrai's face lighted and he answered quickly and joyfully, "I could not tell tha what it would mean, books, new ones, to read. That will be the greatest service one friend could do another. I will read them and return them to the rocks. It is a lonely place. No one will know." He hardly realized she was gone, she went so quickly, running as she had run in the old

Cherryville days when she had been late for school and with the same fear that she had known then.

The curtains were closely drawn at Cluthers, and the schoolroom was lighted. The girls were writing letters as they always did on holiday afternoons. Mehitable knew that if she were seen by any of the governesses, coming in from the moor, so late, she would be "in hot water." It was probable that they would forbid her to go out alone again. Possibly they would forbid the others. At any rate, they would make hard and fast rules about the moor. As she opened the door leading to the entry and turned to look back at its dark beauty she saw some one coming around the corner of the house. It was old Backbow, the gardener. He had seen her, and as she went inside and was hanging up her coat on the nail, he put his head in the door. "It's a bit late for tha, lass, being off on the moor. Some say it's a fearsome place late in the day, but I don't know that, miss. It's a good moor." He creaked off down the entry, toward the kitchen, and Mehitable went quickly through to the deserted hall, and, opening the schoolroom door, peered in. Una was writing, her desk covered with envelopes and stamps. Tip waved a welcoming hand.

Mehitable sat down at her desk next Una, and opening it, drew out her box of writing paper. She was breathing quickly. Old Backbow had seen her, but she did not think that he would tell. They had had talks about the moor, she and Backbow. They were friends. No one else had noticed that she had not come in with the others.

It was like a dream, as all the new life away from

Cherryville seemed to her. Langfrai and his strange home in the cliffs already seemed far away.

Una was whispering to her, "Lucky for you, Merhitale, that no governess saw you. Wherever have you been?"

CHAPTER VIII

NORTH TO "THE LAND O' CAKES"

MEHITABLE did not see the tarn again for a month. There had been a sudden fall of snow early in December, and Madame immediately gave orders that no one should go out on the moor. Madame hated snow, but at least it gave her a chance to get the best of the moor for a while.

It was a long month between Thanksgiving and Christmas. A chill wind seemed to find its way to every nook and corner of the old house. After the snow had melted, which it did very quickly, the rain started in, and for days it flung itself against the leaded windows of Cluthers in a never ceasing, relentless way, discouraging beyond words.

"It can't rain any more, Uuna. It must stop," Mehitable said despairingly, one day at recreation as the two stood looking out of the schoolroom window.

"Why do you mind it? I don't, a bit. If it weren't for Madame, I'd be off on the moor this minute. Who cares about rain? What a set of babies we all are, kept indoors because it rains. Oh, I'd like to—well, of course, I won't stand it much longer. You know that, Mehitable. You know I won't."

"Just what do you intend to do about it?" returned Mehitable, a little snappily.

"You know what. I've told you before," Una answered.

"Oh! Run away! Don't be a silly goose, Una."

"Girls, for the love of something, I don't know what, do stop looking out at the rain and come and and talk to me." It was Fanny Trent who spoke and they turned to greet her. Fanny's sensible outlook on things was a very good leveler just then. Being at Cluthers was only an amusing incident to her and any day she might receive a letter saying that her father had been able to procure passage back to the States and she would be saying good-by to them all.

Mehitable wanted to keep an appointment she had with José Blanc, but she did not want to speak of it to the other two because she knew that José would not like it. Both of them knew that their friendship was unusual for it was founded on a rock of sympathy round which flowed a sea of sorrow. José could not but realize the sincerity of Mehitable's thought of her and her desire to help. That there could be any help for her, José felt sure was impossible, unless her Margot was restored to her.

"There's something I want to do, girls, so I'll leave you two rain lovers together for awhile." Mehitable moved away from Una, and Una called after her:

"How mysterious you are, Mehitable. But I know what it is, so don't think it's such a secret."

There was a touch of annoyance in Una's tone. Mehitable thought about it as she made her way through groups of girls, and on down a deserted back hall. She had been with José a good deal, of late, and she guessed that Una resented it. No one would have

been more sympathetic with José's trouble than Una, but José had said that she did not want it known and so she had not been able to tell Una.

"I believe I'll ask her if she will let me tell Una. I so want Una to know," she thought as she climbed the servants' stairway and made her way toward a ladder at one end of the back hall. The ladder led up to a hole in the wall, and a voice hailed Mehitable from the direction of the hole. "I am waiting, my friend," it said.

Mehitable scrambled up the ladder and sat down beside José. Their meeting place was a small corner of the attic approached only by the ladder and never visited by the household except when cook wanted a string of onions. José had discovered it, on the opposite side of the house from the girls' retreat.

"This place reminds me of the haystack in the barn at home. Barbara and I used to sit there and talk for hours at a time," laughed Mehitable. "I came as soon as I could," she went on, "I've something I very much want to tell you. You know I said I'd write to my friends who have come over to help. Well, I did. I wrote both Miss Meadows and Robin, but the longest letter was to Robin. I gave him all the description of Margot that you gave me, even to the slight cast in the left eye. They are leaving London for Folkestone next week and they'll have more chance to help there. Oh, José—they might—Robin is so strong and bright and quick——"

José caught Mehitable's arm in a firm grasp, though she spoke in her usual, even, quiet way. "You are good, Mehitable," she said.

"No, I'm not. I haven't done anything but write to them. I had an answer from Robin at mail hour after lunch," Mehitable said, drawing a letter from her belt and opening it. It was in Robin's dashing handwriting. "I think I'd better read it aloud," she said over her shoulder to José, who nodded. So Mehitable bent forward to catch a faint gleam of light from the window, and read the letter.

"Dear Mehitable:

"Yours received. Rough luck not seeing you before we go to Folkestone. I'm sure Madame would have welcomed me with open arms, had I been able to manage a visit to Cluthers. Car in good shape. Hope I take it to France later. I've written down the description of Margot Blanc in my note book. Hope she's found, and tell her sister I'll do anything I can. Tell the Irish colleen, Miss Una, that I am grieved that you and she cannot come to London while we are here. Hope the girls' letters and the presents will reach you safely. Will write next from Folkestone. Yours,

"Robin.

"P. S. Write any home news that comes your way!
"Another P. S. Gee—I'd like one of Desire's doughnuts! R."

José's face was tense with interest. She did not understand all of the letter, but she listened carefully and a little color came into her face when Mehitable read what Robin wrote of Margot.

"Robin doesn't say much about it, but I know him

well enough to know he's awfully interested. He will do all that he can, and so will Miss Meadows," Mehitable said earnestly, as she folded the letter and put it in her belt.

"This Robin," José rolled her r's as she said this, in a way that was delightful to Mehitable, "is he your great friend? Do you like him better than all other boys?"

Mehitable shook her head slowly, "Why, no," she answered, "everybody likes Robin. He's so charming, I suppose you'd say, but Johnny Gray and I really know each other better. We're more congenial."

As she spoke Mehitable thought suddenly of Langfrai, the last on her list of boy friends, one that was so utterly different from the others, from any one that she had ever known. She had seen him only that one time, but she felt that they were friends. Langfrai, in his loneliness, needed the thought of her as his friend. That Thanksgiving Day, when she had wandered so far from the tarn and had met Langfrai, was surely the strangest day of her life. She would never forget her first sight of him, or the wild picturesqueness of his home. He was another secret, and she longed to share him with some one else. She knew that in spite of her sorrow for José and her desire to help her, Langfrai's strange situation was just as big a problem, Langfrai, alone in these wild storms, there in the cavern on the mountainside.

"Talk to me, Mehitable. Don't sit there and think of something else. Tell me something, chérie." José was thinking of what Robin had said about Margot.

Mehitable turned toward her friend, smiling happily.

"I've just the thing for you, a letter from Barbara telling all about her surprise visit to New York." Mehitable dived into the pocket of her blue jacket. She knew by heart the letter, which had come a few days ago, and her heart sang over it. Since her sudden friendship with José, it had been mostly Mehitable who had talked, letting José into some of the old days in Cherryville and telling her of some of the friends there. José seldom spoke of her own life, and Mehitable knew that for the time being at least it was just as well that she should not.

"Read the letter to me, chérie," José said softly. Mehitable opened the letter and read.

"Cherryville, Vermont,

"December 7th, 1914.

"Oh, Mehitable!

"Something did happen to me at last, a very wonderful something, and just when I was in the bluest of the blues. Ruby says she has written you all about the good-by party for Robin at Stebbins' farm, and Robin will tell you himself, when he sees you, about all the fun we had. We drank a toast to you, Mehitable! I can only write about the surprise. I can't think of anything else. Finding myself, all of a sudden, on a train bound for New York. Then a week of such fun! Tea at Mary Elizabeth's, or some other fascinating place, every day. Rides on the adorable busses, up Fifth Avenue to Grant's Tomb. I loved the river best of all. We did so many things I hardly know where to begin to tell you about them.

"Shopping was the greatest fun, for father put three five dollar bills in his note to me at the station. I bought an electric toaster for Aunt Comfort, but Ruby says she's written about the presents, so I won't. The night we went to the "Quaker Girl," I found a gold-colored cloak with a mink collar, on my bed. Miss Meadows, of course. She said she did not intend to give presents at all this winter. People would have to take the will for the deed, as she had need for her money in war work, but she had never given me a present and this was the one exception she was making! You know her brusque way of speaking!

"We went to the Hippodrome one afternoon, and Robin imitated the clown so perfectly, in our sitting room at the Waldorf, afterward, that Miss Meadows laughed until she cried. He is a jolly soul. "We went in a boat to the Statue of Liberty and climbed hundreds of stairs, but it was worth it. If only we could have done it together, you and I, —everything, I mean.

"The shop windows were so wonderful to me, Mehitable. You know how I love to see pretty clothes and think about them. I'm going to try to make you a blouse like one I saw in Best's window. It will be ever so much prettier than the blue one I sent by Robin.

"Miss Meadow's friend, Mrs. Forest, went with us to the boat and put me on my train afterward. It was hard saying good-by to them, but it was thrilling. I waved and waved and Robin waved something large and red. I think it was his old sweater.

"Oh, Mehitable, will they give you half my messages!"

Mehitable folded the letter and put it back in her pocket. José was interested in spite of herself, partly on Mehitable's account, but largely because of hearing about Miss Meadows and Robin. Robin had said that he would help to find Margot. José was brighter that afternoon than any of them had ever seen her. She ate three pieces of bread and treacle for tea, and laughed at a joke of Tip's. She did not join in the conversation, but the girls were quick to see a difference in her.

"José was almost human to-day," Tip remarked that evening.

"She has a lovely smile," commented Noel Pope.

"Has any one ever heard Noel say a mean thing about any girl in this school!" exclaimed Una, giving Noel an affectionate pat.

"Never. Well, José certainly did seem a good deal more like a human being and less like a marble statue," said Fanny Trent. The three girls and Mehitable were sauntering up and down the long side hall after dinner that evening.

"Christmas in four days! I can't believe it. Noel has plenty of anxiety with two brothers at the front, but at any rate she can go home for Christmas," grumbled Tip. "Hullo, Nan," she went on, as Nancy Graeme came up to them.

"She's left her knitting behind her. The skies will fall. It's the first time in weeks I've seen you without it, Nancy," commented Fanny.

Nancy looked first at Mehitable and then at Una.

"I'd have a bit of a word with the two of you," she said.

Some one called, "Come and dance," from the schoolroom and Fanny and Tip waltzed down the hall in the direction of the voice. The sound of a piano out of tune and bursts of laughter came from the schoolroom.

Nancy stood facing Mehitable and Una. Her face was solemn, but there was a twinkle in her eye. "I'd a letter from aunt. I'm going home to Ayr for the week, to-morrow," she announced. There had been some question about her going and the other two knew how happy she must be.

"Splendid, Nan!" Una said heartily.

Mehitable hugged the small straight figure, and in spite of the lump in her throat, said warmly, "You know I'm ever so glad for you, Nan."

"There's more to it than that," Nancy went on. "Aunt sends a word of welcome to you both. She invites you to come with me. Madame is willing, if you want to come."

The two girls looked at Nancy and then at each other. Then they jumped up and down as though they were seven instead of seventeen.

"Nancy Graeme, it can't be true! Scotland! Ayr! Leaving Cluthers for a whole week! It's too good to be true! Madame says yes! Oh, Nan!" exclaimed Mehitable.

Nancy's eyes glowed but she said crisply, "It's plain and small and no frills. We keep but one servant and we've prayers night and morning."

"So we have here, you dear Nancy. She can't dampen our enthusiasm, can she, Mehitable? Joy of joys, we'll be away from Cluthers. Let's tell the others!" Una caught Nancy's hand and would have run toward the schoolroom, but Nancy shook her head.

"I've no time to be rushing around in there. I've my bag to pack, and so have both of you!"

They followed her meekly upstairs, stopping at Madame's office on the way, for a confirmation of the amazing news that they could actually depart on the morrow with Nancy for Christmas week in Ayr. They left just after lunch the next day, a clamor of good-bys following them down the drive, old Backbow grumbling at the size of their bags, a sleety rain whirling about them. Miss Derk bought their tickets, put them into an empty second-class compartment, and answered their farewell waves with a crisp smile.

Una chatted steadily during the journey. Nancy answered her questions patiently, wishing she were not quite so enthusiastic. Mehitable was also excited, but her mind was so full of problems, and the last twenty-four hours had been so overcrowded with the rush of packing and planning, that she was glad to have a quiet time in which to think. She sat with her chin pressed against the rough, red velvet of the carriage cushion, wind-blown wisps of smoke swirling about her, now and then a startling, sweet breath of wet heather wafted in to her.

There had been no time for any talk with José before leaving, except for a word the night before when they had exchanged presents. She had gone to José's room

with a badly done up tissue paper package containing her own copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's poems. She had found that José loved to read, and enjoyed English books. She had written a Christmas message on the flyleaf and had told José she must not open it until Christmas Day. She felt guilty at going away and leaving José and had been relieved to see that Fanny Trent had developed a sudden interest in the Belgian girl and had stood beside her, her arm across José's shoulders, as they drove away. "I'll do the best I can for her while you're gone, *Mehitable*," Fanny had said, and *Mehitable* had felt for some time that Fanny, next to herself, was the Cluthers girl whom José liked best.

José's present, neatly wrapped, was tucked in her bag next to many other mysterious packages which her friends had put in at the last minute.

It was of Langfrai that *Mehitable* thought most as she sat looking out at the rain. Her meeting with him had been so strange and unexpected and the whole experience so different from anything that she had ever dreamed of. It was not a dream but a serious fact that Langfrai was living in the innermost heart of the moor, in the midst of the wild storms that had swept across it, to the very doors of Cluthers. What would Una and Nancy say if they knew of Langfrai? It was a splendid secret, this knowing Langfrai, but it was one which brought worry along with it. She had not been able to go to the tarn to hide the books in the rock. Langfrai would think she had forgotten.

"Stop looking out of the window, *Mehitable*. There'll be tea at the next station. Wake up!" Nancy's

voice brought her to present things. She sat up and smoothed her hair.

The train began to slow up, and Una leaned out of the upper half of the door. "I'm perishing for tea," she said, waving Nancy away from the window and beckoning wildly to a small boy who came down the platform at a running pace. "Three teas here, please," she said as he came up, handing him some money and lifting in a basket. A moment later the guard's whistle sounded and they were off again. They busied themselves opening the basket and taking out cups and saucers. The tea was good and as they were all three hungry, the war bread and the pale slabs of plumcake were all that could be desired.

"We're on the way to Scotland. We're going to visit Nan!" exclaimed Mehitable, holding out her cup for more tea which Una poured from an earthenware teapot with a cracked spout.

"There will be no gayety nor balls. There will be Mr. Twilltrees, the minister, and his sister, Abby, for dinner Christmas Day. That's all in the way of entertainment," put in Nancy.

Mehitable and Una roared with laughter at this. "Don't be a goose, Nan. You know we'll adore it. The very fact of leaving Cluthers is almost too wonderful to be true," said Una, giving Nancy's shoulder an affectionate pat.

"Nan knows how I've always wanted to go home with her. I know the house almost as well as though I'd been there, the glass cupboard at the end of the front hall, the brick fireplace in the sitting room, with *LOVE THE GOOD* engraved upon it, the——"

"Keep the rest for me to see with my own eyes, please, Mehitable. I do hope Nan's aunt will take a fancy to me." Una turned to Nancy with a twinkle in her eye. "Do you think she will, Nan?" she asked.

Nancy shook her head. "It's hard to say. It's not often she takes a fancy to one more than to another," she replied, and Mehitable who sat next her gave her a little hug.

"I've been thinking of those cold winter nights when we used to talk at the Château, and you told me about the little house in Ayr, and I told you about my home, and Aunt Comfort and Barbie. You were almost as homesick as I was, but you wouldn't own up to it," she said.

It cleared suddenly with a flash of sunshine from under a mass of dusky clouds. The sun silvered the bleak meadowlands, turning the copses and hedges to radiance. Mehitable, looking out, remembered suddenly what Langfrai had said.

"It was all a forest once. There were robbers and pirates——"

"Goodness, Mehitable, who cares! Let's have a good talk, the three of us, about what's to be done at Cluthers after the holidays. We all say we won't stick as it is. I say we get together and map out changes——"

"It's well enough as it is. There is too much trouble in the minds of many to care," Nancy said soberly, and Una frowned. It was so like Nancy to come in with some "dure" remark, just when they were beginning to enjoy themselves. There had been no

news of Miles or Patrick for a month. Una stood up and moved restlessly about the compartment.

Mehitable came up to her and stood beside her, an arm across her shoulders, both of them swaying to the motion of the train. "There's the moor. Think of it in springtime," she said.

"We'd best plan some real way of helping," Nancy went on, imperturbably. "We'd best put our minds together."

"That's true, Nan," assented Una. "What can we do? We might act a play, and ask the villagers to come. We'd charge something——"

"Bad traveling," wet-blanketed Nancy.

"The farmers have their carts and are used to bad roads. Some of the gentry still have their carts," returned Una.

"Mehitable might write a play. We could charge a bob and ask all the country around to come and see it," Nancy said again, slowly, as though still doubtful about the proceeding.

The train was slackening speed. "We're there!" exclaimed Nancy, beginning to fold up her traveling rug. They made hasty preparations for departure, Mehitable looking wildly about for her kodak which Nancy found under the seat. There was no one to meet them at the station, but as Nancy had not expected any one, she was not surprised.

"I'll find a fly. There will be one around the corner. It's a good mile out. Just you mind the luggage," she directed, walking around the side of the station and returning in a minute in a carriage driven by a boy who jumped off his high seat as he slowed up at the

corner of the platform and lifted up the bags. Mehitable and Una jumped in, and they were driven at a slow pace past neat shops with rows of shiny ha'penny buns in the windows. The sun shone brightly on the uneven pavement, groups of soldiers stood at the street corners, and there was the sharp call of a bugle somewhere.

They turned into a wide street with tall houses on either side. Neat, tall rows of hedges guarded the houses from the eyes of passers-by. They stopped in front of a small gray house with a peaked roof, a bright green door in the middle of its trim hedge.

"It's just like a story," thought Mehitable, as Nancy paid the driver.

"The servant will come for the bags," said Nancy, and they followed her up a straight box-bordered path to the house.

CHAPTER IX

THE TWO ROBERTS

THE first evening at Nancy's was as charming to Mehitable as she had suspected it would be. Una wondered at this and remarked on it after they had gone to their room. "Why do you say it's adorable, Mehitable? You are really too quaint. I love Nan and I think it's the greatest fun, the three of us being together here; but I fail to see anything fascinating about it. Miss Graeme certainly isn't exciting, though she's ever so kind. You really are a curio, Mehitable!" Una brushed her hair vigorously as she spoke, and Mehitable laughed.

"Don't you see, Una? It's being in Scotland, in Ayr, and it's all so adorable. Isn't Peters, the servant, a dear? He was Nan's grandfather's butler, and now he does everything for them all. I love Aunt Ishbel. Nan gave me quite a wrong idea of her. She isn't a bit severe. She laughed when you said all those mad things about Cluthers. I don't believe she's ever seen a girl like you. Wasn't the high tea fun? The scones were so good. Did you know that Mr. Twilltrees has asked me to go to see Robert Burns' cottage to-morrow? He would have asked you, but you said the thought bored you. That was really too awful of you!"

Mehitable braided her hair in a long, fat braid as she talked. Una yawned.

"I thought the Twilltrees would never go home. I was so sleepy I almost went to sleep. Don't say a word to me after we're in bed, Mehitable, for I won't answer. It must be the Scotch air that makes me dead to the world, absolutely."

Mehitable was sleepy also, and lay awake only long enough to think over the events of the evening: all of them sitting about the fire, Aunt Ishbel, Nancy, Una and herself; the arrival of Mr. Twilltrees and his sister, Abby, Nancy's former school-teacher. Mehitable had been quite in awe of her, remembering Nancy's saying that she had been accustomed to slapping their hands with a ruler when they did not behave. She liked the minister at once, and was looking forward to her engagement with him to see Burns' cottage the next day. She fell asleep thinking about it.

They had haggis for breakfast which Una greatly enjoyed and which Mehitable disliked. After the meal they went to a fragrant bakery with Nancy to buy "cookies" for tea. They were, in reality, small buns filled with cream and very different from the articles of the same name which Desire used to make, ginger-cookies, hot from the oven. Mehitable felt a homesick pang as she thought of them. It was too near Christmas to think too much about Cherryville. Una had teased her about being homesick all the morning, for she had said something about longing for Cherryville when she woke up. "You hear Cherryville a-callin' and you don't hear nothin' else, Mehitable!"

she exclaimed, as they waited for Nancy to buy her cookies.

"Nonsense, it's just because it's all so enchanting here that I think of home. I so often wish Barbie could do things and see things with me," *Mehitable* answered.

Mr. Twilltrees arrived promptly at three o'clock in his dogcart driving his mare, *Tweedie*. He looked very tall and gaunt. His long face, gray beard, and dignified expression made *Una* giggle. "How can any one look as much like a Scotch minister as he does? Why, any one would know what he was, if they met him in the Sandwich Islands," *Una* whispered to *Mehitable*, helping her on with her jacket, for, as usual, she was not ready when her cavalier arrived for her. "You'll be late on the Judgment Day, *Mehitable*," Nancy remarked calmly, as they came out on the steps to see her off.

"*Tweedie* is an odd lass. She'll not go slowly past Alloway Kirk, no matter how much I coax her. I'll see what I can do to make her ease down a bit, but she always goes past that old place as if she knew about the devils that danced there in 'Tam O' Shanter,'" *Mr. Twilltrees* said to *Mehitable* as they drove along at a smart pace. The wind blew *Mehitable's* hat to one side, and after two attempts she gave up trying to talk. *Mr. Twilltrees* pointed with his whip as they drove past the ancient ruin that had inspired Burns to write his "Tam O' Shanter." The wind made a shouting sound that seemed to *Mehitable* like the loud cackle of the witches, dancing in their midnight orgy.

It was not a season for tourists at the little, low

cottage where Robert Burns was born, and Mr. Twilltrees let them in with a key. It was strange to Mehitable to leave the wild, windy afternoon outside, and to find herself in the rude, quiet, barnlike cottage, with the cow stable just beyond. She was very grateful to the minister for bringing her, but she would have liked to roam around and think, without his explanations about this and that. "He loves Burns so much that it's the greatest pleasure he has in the world, talking about him," she thought.

"Which is your favorite poem, Mr. Twilltrees?" she asked. The minister did not stop to consider at all, but immediately began to recite, standing with his back against the old stone wall.

"JOHN ANDERSON MY JO"

"John Anderson my jo, John,
When we were first acquent,
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonnie brow was brent;
But now your brow is bald, John,
Your locks are like the snow;
But blessings on your frosty pow,
John Anderson my jo.

"John Anderson my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither,
And mony a canty day, John,
We've had wi' ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson my jo."

Mr. Twilltrees voice shook with emotion as he said the lines of the fine old poem, and Mehitable wondered why so confirmed a bachelor should have for his favorite so domestic a poem.

"My apologies, Miss Mehitable, for saying my favorite first. Now please tell me which one of our great poet's works is your choice." Mr. Twilltrees bowed as he spoke and for a moment reminded Mehitable of some one, she could not think whom. Then she remembered. It was of a picture of Ichabod Crane, the funny school-teacher in Washington Irving's legend.

"My favorite is this." Mehitable came up to the low, wooden table next the wall, and she said the poem that had always meant so much to her, since she was a child.

"O WERT THOU IN THE COLD BLAST

"O wert thou in the cold blast,
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee.
Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'.

"Or were I in the wildest waste,
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,
The desert were a paradise
If thou wert there, if thou wert there.
Or were I monarch o' the globe,
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen."

Mr. Twilltrees beamed upon Mehitable as she finished. He was happy to have some one at last who loved Robert Burns as he did and who appreciated what he told about the poet who had been always his delight.

Tweedie trotted faster than ever on the way back to the town, and all Mehitable ever saw of Alloway Kirk was a gray flash. She and the minister had tea at a cosy tea room which, to Mehitable, seemed full of old ladies and pet dogs. There was a splendid coal fire at one end of the room. The tea and hot toast were excellent and so were the brandy balls, a crisp, molasses-tasting cake, which Mr. Twilltrees highly recommended.

"This has been one of the best of all my good days, Mr. Twilltrees," Mehitable said as they went out of the shop, and the minister answered fervently, "It's been one of my best days, too, Miss Mehitable."

As they drove up to Aunt Ishbel's hospitably lighted house, they noticed that the front door stood ajar. Mr. Twilltrees tied Tweedie to the hitching post, and they alighted, opening the green gate and going up the box-bordered walk.

"Whatever is the front door open for? It's very strange!" exclaimed Mr. Twilltrees. The next minute Una peered around the corner of the door, and they both heard some one giggle.

"Here they are. We thought you were never coming! A Christmas present has arrived for you from England, Mehitable, and we are so anxious for you to see it." Una danced out on to the doorstep as she spoke.

"How exciting! It must be from Miss Meadows!" Mehitable exclaimed.

"Yes, you're right. It is from Miss Meadows, Mehitable," came a familiar voice as Mehitable ran into the hall. She stopped short, her hand on the door. Coming toward her, a plate of cake in one hand, was Robin!

They all talked at once and it was some little time before Mehitable was able to find out all she wanted to know. Robin had arrived soon after she had left with Mr. Twilltrees for Burns' cottage. He was already quite at home and had made friends with each one of them, even with gruff Peters. More than that, Aunt Ishbel had insisted that he stay with them instead of at the inn and he was to occupy Nancy's room. A cot had been put up for her in the room with Mehitable and Una.

"Robin, it can't be true. It's too wonderful. It just doesn't seem possible!" Mehitable sank down in a chair, her hat falling to the floor beside her. She had thought that she would put up her hair while she was at Nancy's and was more than sorry that she had not already begun to do so. "I don't believe he thinks I'm grown-up at all," she said to herself.

"It was Miss Meadows' idea, Mehitable. She seemed to think I'd make a good Christmas present and I told her that I knew you would, anyway." Robin came and sat down on the floor beside her. He was good to look upon, in his khaki uniform, and Mehitable wondered what Una was thinking about him. They seemed to be good friends already and joked back and

forth as though they had known each other since the Cherryville days.

"There's no use. I simply don't know where to begin. There's so much that I want to know. Robin, think of it, you've seen them all so recently, just a little over a month ago. It's wonderful." Mehitable felt the tears coming to her eyes and she looked down, wishing with all her heart that she might talk with Robin alone; and as though Nancy understood just how she was feeling, she said, coming up to them, "Don't you want to walk down to the inn with Robin while he gets his kit, Mehitable? You'll have just about time before supper."

Robin jumped up. "That's a fine idea, Miss Nancy. Do come, Mehitable. We two Yanks have all sorts of home things to talk over. I'll try and remember some of the millions of messages the girls sent you!" he exclaimed. In five minutes they were on their way down the quiet street, both excited, both happy.

"Now, where shall we begin? Tell me, first of all, about you, yourself, Robin. You're in uniform. It's too thrilling. Tell me quick, all about everything!" Mehitable fairly jumped with excitement as they walked along together.

"I'm going out in the A. M. C. in just a few days. That's one reason we couldn't come up to Yorkshire. There's been so much to see about. I'm awfully glad I can go. Don't say anything about it when you write, Mehitable, for you know what mother is like when she is worried. It's so bad for her. I'm going to be a motor messenger, and they don't know it at home."

Mehitable said nothing for a moment. It was all so

strange, so much was happening all of a sudden. She was not yet quite able to realize that Robin was actually there with them. Then the thought of his going almost at once to France was new and startling. She asked question after question about the Cherryville friends and was not at all satisfied with Robin's answers. "Why are boys so aggravating, Robin Ward! You know you're not telling me anything I really want to know. Are the girls just the same, or are they much more grown-up?" Mehitable turned and looked at Robin, and he grinned in reply.

"I'd hate to think what might become of me if I dared to say they weren't grown-up, Mehitable. That's one of the things I was to be most positive about, their being grown-up, I mean. They said to be sure and tell you that they were. Oh, Jehoshophat! I believe that wasn't the thing to have said. They wanted me to say it on my own. Forget that I said it, Mehitable."

Mehitable threw back her head and laughed. "You're just the same old Robin. My, it does seem good to see you! I've imagined a great many things in my day, but never anything as Alice-in-Wonderland-ish as you and I being here in Scotland together," she said.

They had a merry supper, sitting at the table so long that Mr. Twilltrees called before they had left the dining room. They went on into the parlor and sat about the fire. It was one of the evenings that Mehitable knew she would never forget. Aunt Ishbel, her paisley shawl about her shoulders, listening to Robin's account of their voyage across and the race they had with a submarine, the minister sitting well

back in an easy chair, his head on one side, Una and Nancy and herself close together on the horsehair sofa, and Peters creaking in every now and then to replenish the fire.

"So you are going out into the midst of this cruel war, my young friend? You will learn much of the world, but remember the counsels of your childhood, the many lessons you learned at your mother's knee, and turn from the devil when he comes your way."

Mr. Twilltrees spoke solemnly, clearing his throat. Mehitable and Una looked at him in awe.

"He does make things sound so dreary. Do look at Robin. He's trying to be solemn, but I know he will break out and say something that will shock the minister in just a second," Mehitable whispered to Una.

"He's an old croak. Isn't it thrilling that Robin is here! Do tell him I'd like to have him call me 'Una.' 'Miss O'Hara' is so formal," Una whispered back.

When Mr. Twilltrees stood up to say good night, they all, with the exception of Aunt Ishbel, decided to walk a little way with him. It was a clear, star-lit night, and there was a hint of snow in the air. Both Robin and Mehitable were thinking of Cherryville and Robin's face looked sober. "He's not used to being homesick and he doesn't know what's the matter with him. It's because it's Christmas," Mehitable thought.

They escorted Mr. Twilltrees to his door. He asked them most cordially to come in and have a little visit with his sister, Abby, but they politely declined. After they had left him, Una said that she would like to walk farther, and they strolled on toward the Doone. Nancy wondered whether or not Aunt Ishbel would

approve, but it did not worry her particularly and she found herself enjoying the unusualness of it all as much as any of them.

It was the best thing she had done since coming to Scotland, Mehitable decided. Strolling along the banks of the Doone, the moon making a silver path under the two bridges, the "Auld Brig o' Doone," and the new one, the town nestling close to the river bank, and the peace of the winter night all about them—it was something to remember.

"The Auld Brig's a queer thing. I'm not as superstitious as most of my friends, but I do think there's something strange about it. It's so old that it's seen most everything that's happened around here. It's seen the Highland clans gathering to swoop down on your beloved Yorkshire moor, Mehitable, and it's seen stranger sights than that," Nancy remarked as the four of them stood looking across at its structure, so dark under the stars.

"Goodness, Nan, you give me the creeps! I've always said that you could tell the best ghost stories of any one I knew. Come on, children. Let us go back and make toffy. Nan said we might," Una said as she turned away.

They stayed so late in the kitchen making toffy that Aunt Ishbel called to Nancy from the head of the stairs, reminding her that it was nearly midnight. Nancy was enjoying it all so much that she hated to break up the party, but she knew that the neighbors must be wondering what was going on. Robin and Mehitable sat on the kitchen table eating toffy and telling Cherryville incidents to the others. Mehitable

noticed that Robin looked often at Una and she wondered what he thought of her.

Nancy remarked to the two girls after they had gone up to their room that Mr. Twilltrees and Aunt Ishbel both admired him immensely. "And as I told you both in the train on the way here from Cluthers, aunt isn't one to take a fancy easily," she said.

Mehitable answered with a little laugh as she searched for her handkerchief case in her bag, "That's Robin, Nan. He's a charmer, you know. He always could make people like him, without half trying."

Una sat down on the foot of the bed and clasped her hands about her knees. "You like Robin, don't you, Una?" Mehitable asked. She could not resist the question.

Una nodded. "Yes, I do. He's different, of course, and he has such an American accent, but he's ever so nice."

"As he is American it's not strange that he should speak like one, Una," put in Nancy crisply.

Mehitable had thought that nothing could be added to make her more excited, but, before leaving, Mr. Twilltrees had asked Aunt Ishbel's consent to his taking them all to Edinburgh the next day. He had to go to a funeral and some friends were lending him their car. Aunt Ishbel had declined for herself but had no objection to the "house party," as Robin called them, going with the minister. It was the last touch of joy, and it seemed to Mehitable as though she could not wait until the morning. Edinburgh was the one city above all others which she most longed to see.

CHAPTER X

AULD REEKIE

UNA was in high spirits at breakfast. She and Robin did most of the talking. Aunt Ishbel was worried about her brother, whose rheumatism would not permit of his coming home from the relatives at Dumfries for Christmas. Instead of the usual family gathering, the house was full of young people. It was all very unusual. But the boy was so bright and Peters liked him. He was handy, too, and he was going out to the war to risk his life. Aunt Ishbel sighed as she poured Una her third cup of tea. The war was near. There was fear in Ayr and in the seaport towns. There was danger from bombardment.

"I'll just take an oat cake or two along in my pocket, if you don't mind, Miss Graeme," Robin remarked, spreading some of the strawberry jam on one of the oat cakes, and meeting Aunt Ishbel's uncertain smile with a confident one, bringing a light of merriment to her eyes.

A little later she watched them as they motored away with Mr. Twilltrees in a shabby old car that looked as though it had been doing army service. Robin sat between Mehitabel and Una on the back seat, and Nancy in front beside the minister. It was chilly and dark and Nancy suggested that they fasten the leather cur-

tains at the sides of the car, but this idea was over-ruled by the others who wanted to "view the landscape o'er," as Robin expressed it.

Their way was straight across Fenwick moor to Glasgow. The wind whistled by them and the wide stretch of country greeted them. Robin sniffed the air. "Moors *are* good, Mehitable. I'm beginning to agree with you about them," he said.

"Mehitable thinks there's no moor so wonderful as the one near Cluthers," Una smiled across at Robin, and he smiled back at her. Her silver-gold hair framed her small, eager face. She wore her squirrel coat and the green velvet cap. She was different from any girl that Robin had ever known and he did not quite know why. She was different in the indefinable way that all things were different in the old world.

They lunched in Glasgow at a quiet coffee shop, the rain pounding against the narrow windows. Mr. Twilltrees was worried about their passing through Glasgow in this hurried way and he discoursed on the city while they partook of steak and kidney pie and milk pudding with stewed plums. "There's no finer city and none that has held itself more proper." He addressed himself to Mehitable, who was not interested in what he said. Her whole heart leaped ahead to Edinburgh. Robin was talking about ice hockey with Una, and Nancy was busy studying her notebook to see what errands Aunt Ishbel had intrusted to her to do in Edinburgh.

It was not quite eleven when they left the coffee shop. An early lunch had been necessary. "We'll not want to bother about anything more to eat when we

reach Edinburgh," Mehitable remarked as they made quick progress toward the city of which she had so often dreamed.

"Wait until five o'clock. You'll be glad of a cup of tea and a hot bun," put in Nancy. She was a happy Nancy, and in her own way she was as excited as the rest, although one would never have suspected it.

It had ceased raining and the sun shone through scattering clouds. It gilded the spires and chimneys of the city, making patches of light through the shadows of the low-lying hills around it. Mr. Twilltrees had church business to attend to and so it was left to Nancy to do the honors of the city. They were to meet the minister for tea at five-thirty and the afternoon lay before them. The sun still shone bravely as they made their way along crowded Prince's Street. The whole place seemed alive with soldiers in khaki, and suddenly the swirl of bagpipes heralded the approach of a Highland regiment. Mehitable's heart beat high as the soldiers swung by, in their kilts and tartans. Beyond and above them Edinburgh Castle, like a proud protector, towered over the city, the sunshine touching its gray fortress to blood red. This was Edinburgh, set like a jewel in a valley, a brilliant city where scarlet and blue mingled with shadowy gray.

Mehitable was thankful that Nancy did not begin to plan what they should do. She seemed contented to let them go their own way and they wandered up and down Prince's Street for a half hour or more, peeking in at the fascinating shop windows and finally going into two or three of them. Robin made several mysterious purchases and Mehitable bought a Scotch pebble

brooch for Aunt Comfort because she had heard her once say that she admired them. There was an amber brooch set in pearls that she wanted for Young Madame but she did not dare to inquire the price, knowing that she could not afford it. She knew, too, that Young Madame was not caring about brooches just then, but still she wanted to buy her something beautiful.

"Now for the castle. We can only view it from a distance. They won't let us go up to it, but we can see Holyrood, and that's something," Nancy said at last. She met them after a hurried shopping expedition at Macvitties and Guest's, a delightful bakery at the end of the street.

Mehitable remembered that one afternoon all her life. It came to her with odd flashes of delight in after years. It was more vivid to her than the enchanting time in Ireland with Una, the spring before, less dream-like, more definite. Robin, Una, Nancy, and herself, were a part of its magnificence. Robin in Edinburgh! What a delightful thing to realize! Robin's twinkling brown eyes and ruddy cheeks looked just as they had in Cherryville, but he was taller than in the old days and his khaki uniform made him look older. He was in his usual high spirits and he made Nancy laugh so often that Una remarked upon it.

"I wish you'd come to Cluthers, Robin, for your effect on Nan alone would be worth while. You've absolutely won over Miss Graeme, so who knows what you might be able to accomplish with Madame?" Una gave Robin an approving glance which he answered with a laugh. The four of them were climbing the

winding, dingy, lanelike road—leading to old Greyfriars Churchyard. Above and around the lean shabbiness of sprawling tenements looked down at them, and harsh voices called back and forth from window to window of the rickety dwellings.

"Isn't it just like Nan to bring us to a cemetery the first thing?" Una whispered to Mehitable, as they entered the quiet churchyard of kings. Mehitable nodded her reply, smiling across at Nancy. How staid and earnest, and altogether lovable she was!

They walked about among the old crumbling slabs that marked the graves of warriors who had fought for Scotland, of long ago knights in armor and of hundreds of the plain Scottish folk who had lived in a time of plague and famine, of witch-burning and superstition, of war and wealth, and of foreign ways that could not hold against Scotch ways.

Mehitable was so busy thinking of something that Robin had said to her as they walked along Prince's Street, that she could not thrill as much over the ancient graveyard as she would otherwise have done. Robin had remarked, turning to her in the charming impulsive way she knew so well of old, "Mehitable, I didn't know that Una was so"—he had hesitated over the word—"so fascinating. Why, Mehitable, she's lovely!" As they wandered through the strange old place Mehitable felt excited and interested. Robin had seemed older, somehow, when he had spoken of Una. What would she say when she knew what he had said!

Robin did not like the churchyard and said so. "Creepy place, seems to me," he commented, and Una agreed.

"You funny Nan," she laughed, turning to Nancy. "This may be very interesting and ancient, but it's dreary."

"Me for Holyrood," put in Robin.

"Me, too," laughed Una. "Holyrood and then buns, war buns, of course, but still, buns!" A Una in good spirits was a very charming Una!

"I'll tell you what we'd best do. I've an errand hereabouts and I'll meet you in an hour at Holyrood, in the banquet hall." Nancy buttoned her gray coat at the throat as she spoke.

Mehitable put her hand on Nancy's arm. "I'd like to go with you, Nan. I think there's a thrill about the Old Town. I want to see it with you." She looked up at the climbing street, and then down at the zig-zag by-ways leading to the depths of gray alleys and the gloom of Saint Giles Cathedral. "We'll meet Una and Robin in the banquet hall later," she said.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Robin, turning to Una, who nodded smiling.

"The Banquet Hall at four. Don't be late for you'll want an hour for Holyrood, Mehitable," Una called over her shoulder as she turned away with Robin. They both waved as they reached the roadway.

Mehitable and Nancy walked out of Greyfriars and turned down the winding street, leading to the dreariness of the Old Town.

"This is what I was wishing for, but I never thought it would work out so well." Nancy turned a little shyly toward Mehitable. "I've so often wished that you and I could walk about the Old Town together. I like the Old Town best." They were ascending some crooked

steps above the cathedral, as she spoke. Una and Robin had disappeared, having run down the hill, turning off in the direction of Holyrood which is set in the heart of the Old Town. "I'm not much at saying things, Mehitable, and you know I'm stupid with strangers. Robin is so friendly, he's easier to talk to than other boys, but you're the only person in the world I really like to talk to." Nancy smiled as Mehitable burst out laughing, but she added soberly, "It's true, Mehitable, and you know it."

"I'd rather do this with you, Nan. I love the Old Town best, too. It is like the Château. It's whispering secrets." Mehitable slipped her arm through Nancy's, and Nancy smiled at her happily.

"It is good, our going off this way, alone. I like Robin Ward. He's friendly and a fine lad. Aunt and Mr. Twilltrees both think so." Nancy stopped before a little shop with a projecting tin roof, as she spoke, and as she half opened the door, she said, "Aunt's sending a bit of a Christmas box to an old shop woman in here. She used to be a servant of granny's, and she's ninety years old." She opened the door and they went inside.

A quavering voice greeted them and an old woman who sat behind a counter waved her crutch at them. There were trays on the counter, containing spools of thread, needle cases, and various odds and ends. An oil stove occupied one end of the shop, and a cot bed and a table the other.

"Miss Nancy, dear lass, it's a good day that brings you. I said to myself this morning, 'I ken there's something in the air.' How be the hame folk?" She

was so old and wrinkled and bunched up that she looked like an autumn leaf as she hobbled forward to speak to them.

They spent a half hour with old Mrs. Wythe, and when they came out into the chill, early twilight, *Mehitable* squeezed Nancy's arm, saying, "She's a dear soul, Nan, and it all seemed so—you know the word I use so much over here—different. I feel so happy, Nan, I can't explain it. I've felt this way three or four times before. There isn't any real reason for it, unless, perhaps, because it's Christmas Eve. I shall love to think of the odd, old shop in the Old Town and of this afternoon with you." There were tears in *Mehitable's* eyes, and Nancy, with unusual demonstration, squeezed her arm in return.

"There's no one in the world like you, *Mehitable*," she said.

"Of course, one reason I'm happy is because of the wonder of it all. I'm on my way to Holyrood, Nancy Graeme. I'm going to the place where fascinating Mary Queen of Scots lived. It's one of the things I've dreamed about. Why do you suppose so many wonderful things happen to me, Nan? Why do so many of my wishes come true?" *Mehitable* spoke earnestly, and smiled at Nancy's characteristic reply:

"They don't always, *Mehitable*. It was a blow to you, not being able to accept Miss Meadows' invitation for you and Una to come to London, before she went permanently to Folkestone. You didn't know then that you were going to see Robin, and you longed and longed to see them because they'd come straight from Cherryville." Nancy spoke decidedly and then,

as they turned a corner suddenly, caught *Mehitable's* arm. "See, there's *Holyrood*," she cried softly, and they stood, two small figures looking up at the wide splendor of that palace which had known love and hatred—held glory, treachery, and magnificence. The high, dark majesty of *Arthur's Seat* rose behind it, and, beyond, the misty blue outline of the *Caledonian Mountains*.

"It's like a picture in red and gray. See, *Nan*, the red of the sky through the ruined abbey, and the red sentry walking up and down. It might be a palace in fairyland!" They stood there for a moment looking up at it.

They did not find *Una* and *Robin* in the *Banquet Hall* and they had roamed about for some time before they came across them. They were standing in front of a picture of *Mary Queen of Scots*, and as *Una* saw them, she called out, "*Mehitable*, come here. Who is she like? Come quickly, I so want you to guess. She's like some one you know, very, very like!"

Mehitable and *Nancy* stood beside them, looking up at the picture of the long-ago queen, and after a moment, *Mehitable* said slowly, "It's like *Young Madame*, only she is more beautiful."

Robin kept close by *Mehitable* for the rest of the time they were at *Holyrood*, and she was so glad to know that he was there with them that she was quite content not to "moon around alone," as *Robin* expressed it.

"I can think and imagine about it in the night at *Cluthers*," she thought.

Una would not take *Holyrood* seriously. She danced

up and down the faded magnificence of the wonderful old rooms and even sang "Tipperary," though in low tones, while the guide explained about the secret staircase up which the murderers of the queen's friend, Rizzio, had escaped, after killing him. Mehitable stood still in the shadow of the window of the queen's bedroom. There was something so sad about the room that it wrung her heart. After all, was it right for them to come with curious eyes to pry into the sorrows of the long ago? There was something sinister in the room, something of the past still clinging. Mehitable caught her breath. That proud, strange queen of those past days of love and war and tangled misadventure, what thoughts she must have had in this very room! The dressing table before which she had made herself beautiful for soirée in the banquet hall, the bed with tattered lace covering it like gray cobweb. It was all like a tragic story half told. Robin's voice broke in on her thoughts.

"Cheer up, Mehitable, it might be worse, for Nancy might have another graveyard ~~up~~ her sleeve. Remember tea in half an hour, and remember also, my young friend, that your Queen Mary has been gathered to her fathers so long she wouldn't care a fig about your sympathy!" Robin's twinkling brown eyes looking down at her brought her back to the present.

"Robin, how can you? Will you ever grow up and be serious about anything, I wonder?" Mehitable began solemnly, but laughed the next minute. "Oh, Robin, do you remember the time you dressed up as a ghost and frightened old Mr. Merriwether, and then walked home with him and he was so grateful that he

let you pick his cherries?" Una and Nancy had come up to them, and as they walked down the long dim flight of stairs leading to the entrance hall, Mehitable told them of this escapade of Robin's.

"We could walk for just a bit of a way up Arthur's Seat if you like, Mehitable. We've a little while before we're to meet Mr. Twilltrees," Nancy suggested and added, turning to Robin, "I know that's what she'd like to do. It's a grand sight on a clear summer night, but now"—she paused a little dubiously—"it will be bad walking." She turned inquiringly to the girls.

"We'll walk up a way, won't we, girls? Mehitable will be able to supply the romance. She'll fix it up somehow so we won't mind any drawback in the weather," said Robin, and the four of them started, laughing, up the hill.

They climbed half way and would have gone farther if Nancy had not announced firmly that they must turn back at once, as it would never do to keep Mr. Twilltrees waiting for his tea. "We'll be late enough reaching home," she said. No one answered her for a moment and there was a touch of gravity on Robin's face which Mehitable had seen only that one time before, when he had told them that he was going to France with the motor corps. There was something not quite earthly about the scene below them. There was no need for Mehitable to romance for them. Above them the sky was thick with restless gray and white clouds which showed the silver glimmer of stars, as they drifted. All about them was the sweet scent of wet earth and the dark shadow of the hills and below the brilliant lights of the New Town, the castle a dark

mass above it, and at their left the dim smokiness of the Old Town with the palace, like a proud mistress, in the heart of it. Far off they could see the flash of the May Lighthouse, and the silver curve of the Firth as it made its way toward the German Ocean. Bugles from the castle sounded clearly in the evening air. They ran down the hill, around the side of the palace, and hailing the first cab they saw, jumped in and found themselves at their bakery tea room before the charm of that moment, looking down from Arthur's Seat, had left them.

Mr. Twilltrees had ordered a table by the window and announced that they were going back by train. There was something the matter with the motor car and it was so late that he did not think it wise to venture back in it. He had put in up for repairs and was not at all pleased with the friends who had lent it to him. He ordered tea and hot currant buns and "jam for the soldier boy." He kept urging Robin to have more jam and said several times, "You don't know when you'll have it with your tea, once you're in France." He seemed puzzled at Robin's account of the afternoon and pained at some of his remarks, especially his answer to the query as to whether he enjoyed his time at Holyrood.

"No, it was spooky. I'd rather have currant buns." Robin took an ample bite of one as he spoke, his brown eyes sparkling. He seemed so obviously to be enjoying himself, that Mr. Twilltrees forgave him his irreverence. The minister tried in vain to obtain a logical account of the afternoon's experience, but the young people, even sober Nancy, seemed in such high spirits

and laughed so much at everything and nothing at all, that he gave up in despair.

Mehitable leaned out of the carriage window as the train puffed away from the city that was like a jewel strung on gray thread. She would keep it always in her dreams.

CHAPTER XI

THE CRYSTAL HEART

THEY had high tea at a table in front of the sitting room fire, Peters had made some muffins and he waited on them, muttering under his breath at intervals, "What an hour for supper! It's most breakfast time!" He brought in the remains of a joint of mutton and put the platter in front of Robin, whispering huskily, "Women folk be weel pleased wi' eggs but the men need mutton!"

It was Christmas Eve, but they were all too tired to realize it. They had had a long, exciting day, and even Robin was content to sit whistling in the firelight, sleepily thinking over the day's experience.

Mehitable started to write in her diary after she had gone to bed, but she was so sleepy that she only wrote a paragraph and fell asleep with the book in her hands. She had a dream in which Mary Queen of Scots and Young Madame seemed one and the same person and when she awoke on Christmas Morning, her first thought was for Young Madame.

"Girls, it snowed in the night. It's a real Christmas Day," called Una from the window where she stood in her blue dressing gown, her hair falling about her shoulders. The world outside was silver white, and the sky showed bravely blue. It was as though the

Christ spirit had turned the gray sadness to white joy, so *Mehitable* thought as she stood beside *Una*, looking out.

After breakfast when *Una* and *Nancy* had gone out of the room on some mysterious Christmas errand, *Robin* came up to *Mehitable*. "Couldn't we go off for a walk and a talk, *Mehitable*? I've had word that I must leave before noon, to-morrow, instead of waiting until night. Our reverend friend and others will be dropping in all day. This is our chance and I want to have a talk with you," *Robin* spoke seriously. *Mehitable* jumped into her coat and pulled her tam over her brown locks, while *Robin* aided her with her galoshes. They started off without a word to any one. *Mehitable* was excited and happy at having *Robin* all to herself. She had been so delighted at the sudden friendship between *Una* and *Robin* that she had felt only pleasure when the two had gone off so gayly to *Holyrood*, leaving her and *Nancy* in *Greyfriars*. As they walked along, now, in the old chummy way, she knew that the intimacy born of old association was a stronger bond of friendship than any.

Robin walked in silence for a few minutes, then said slowly, "I'm leaving for *Paris* in two days. That's why I have to light out from here in the morning. As I told you, I'm going to do the job I wanted most—messenger work. That's what I wanted from the first, but I didn't think I'd get it. It's only because of *Miss Meadows* that I have it. She's awfully well known and the head of one of the *A. M. C.* divisions." *Mehitable* had a sense of oppression. The war seemed suddenly to be closing in about her, touching her with

ghostly fingers as it had done the summer before in Belgium. Her voice was steady when she answered him and she grew up a little in that moment. "I'll write often, Robin, and Una will, too. We're awfully proud of you," she said.

Robin laughed out suddenly, not seeming to hear her last words. "See that jolly bird hopping around in the snow with his head on one side? He looks just like Miss Prince when she's trying finery on you girls. I looked in on her one day when she was making your red and white checked silk. Glory, *Mehitable*, you ought to have seen your face. You looked as cheerful as a funeral!" He did not speak of his leaving again. As they walked along the snowy streets, they talked of *Cherryville*, and Robin told over again some of the messages that the girls had sent *Mehitable*. He patiently recounted the adventures of the week in New York with Miss Meadows and was as enthusiastic about Barbara as *Mehitable* could desire.

"She was stunning in that gold-colored opera cloak that Miss Meadows gave her the night we went to the opera, *Mehitable*. I felt awfully sorry that she couldn't come along with us. My, but she's a devoted friend to you. No one will ever take your place with her." Robin paused a moment, half expectantly, *Mehitable* thought, and she burst out with, "No one will take her place with me. You know that, Robin Ward."

Robin seemed satisfied at this and smiled cheerily, saying after a minute, "Well, of course I know that, *Mehitable*, but—well, Una is so fascinating."

For the rest of the walk *Mehitable* talked earnestly

to Robin about José's fair-haired sister, Margot. "Who knows, you may have word of her, Robin," she said.

They opened their presents early in the afternoon, before dinner, and they had a merry time, in spite of the news that Robin must leave the next day. Mehitable was delighted with the blue Russian blouse which Barbara had made for her and Robin had brought with him. She cried a few tears over Aunt Comfort's blue scarf and Desire's petticoat, and the three girls hailed a large jar of Desire's peach jam with shouts of joy. Robin told them how he had received it.

"Desire came to me just before we left, when I ran in to say good-by to them. She looked awfully guilty about the jam, for she heard us say we couldn't carry much, but I hadn't the heart to refuse her when she said, 'Mehitable sets such store by peach jam and I don't believe she gets enough to eat in that outlandish school, anyway.'"

"Desire is perfectly right. We don't have anywhere near enough of anything that's good. This jam will be gone almost before the jar is open. We'll save it for a lonely night at Cluthers, when fun seems a thing of the dim past." Una was examining critically a hockey stick which her brother, Miles, had sent her. "Good of old Miles to send it. He asked Winchy to buy it for him," she went on.

Mr. Twilltrees and his sister, Abby, came to Christmas dinner, which was rather a solemn meal. Aunt Ishbel was worried about her brother's rehumanism and seemed inclined to take a pessimistic view of

everything. She shook her head at the news of Robin's sudden departure. "I'm glad we have a fine lad like you to help in this war, but it's a dangerous part of the service, being a motor messenger," she said to Robin. There was a moment's silence after she spoke and then Robin remarked that Peters had promised to send him oat cakes and brandy balls, and that he hoped they would all write him every day.

He drew Mehitable aside as they came out of the dining room, and put a small package into her hands. "It's something for Una, a crystal heart. I bought it in Edinburgh yesterday. But, Mehitable, I don't know her very well and I don't dare to give it to her. You keep it and sometime at Cluthers you might let her see it. Maybe she won't want it. I don't mind telling you that I think she's very attractive. I gave you girls each a box of candy and you the new Kodak album with those photos of the crowd at home, but I'd rather you kept the heart until another time." He spoke very seriously, and Mehitable answered him gravely. "I'll keep it for her until sometime when she needs cheering very badly," she said.

Mr. Twilltrees brought out his flute and played some old Scottish airs to Aunt Ishbel's accompaniment. Una sat on a hassock at Nancy's feet. She wore her black velvet frock which was donned at Cluthers only for the most festive occasions, and had wound her bright hair about her head, dressing it in a way that gave her height and dignity. Her face looked so very young that this change did not greatly affect her otherwise grown-up appearance, but as Robin had said, she was "lovely." Mehitable sat on the sofa with Abby Twill-

trees. She had not dared to look at Robin when the minister first began to play, because he had always, in the old days, had a fiendish delight in making her laugh at the wrong time. It was not until Mr. Twilltrees had finished "Auld Robin Grey" and "Comin' through the Rye," and had begun on "Robin Adair," that Mehitable looked across at Robin. He sat leaning forward, his chin in his hand, and he did not notice her at all. He was looking at Una, with the same serious expression that he had when he spoke of going to France.

Miss Abby Twilltrees suggested in a stern voice that they might have some part-singing. Nancy found a worn, red book among some music in the piano stool, and they all gathered around Aunt Ishbel at the piano. They sang a few carols and then drifted into "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes" and "Love's Old Sweet Song." Robin knew nothing at all about singing, and came in now and then with a wrong note, grinning at Mehitable as he did so. Miss Abby Twilltrees had a fine alto and Aunt Ishbel a quavering soprano. Peters brought in tea and seed cake at two o'clock, and at Aunt Ishbel's request, joined in the singing of "My Ain Folk," which, it seemed, was a special favorite of his. Mehitable felt tears rushing to her eyes and, for a few minutes, singing for her was out of the question. She and Robin certainly were far from their "Ain Folk," and Robin was going out alone into the desolation of the war.

The next morning there was little or no time for a private talk, and Mehitable was glad that they had had the walk the day before. Robin's train left earlier

than they had expected and there was much fuss in packing him a lunch basket, helping him stow his belongings, plus Christmas presents, into his already crowded bag, writing addresses and giving each other last messages. Una promised to write and Robin came to Mehitable the last moment, saying, "You'll see that Una does write, won't you? She may find it a bore, you know," and Mehitable, answered solemnly, "I certainly will, but it won't be necessary, for she wants to write to you."

Mr. Twilltrees arrived with Tweedie and the dogcart at exactly the right moment and they all crowded around it, except Aunt Ishbel who waved good-by from the doorstep.

"*Au revoir* and don't forget us. Three cheers for Cherryville," Mehitable called after him. When they were almost out of earshot, Robin leaned half way out of the dogcart, calling back, "Give my love to Madame. Tell her I'm sorry I didn't get to Cluthers to see her!"

There were still two days left of the girls' visit in Ayr, but the spirit seemed to go out of things after Robin left. None of the three was absolutely sorry when the afternoon departure came and they said good-by to the little house, to Aunt Ishbel and Peters and the Twilltrees. They had had a wonderful visit. To Nancy, it was always difficult, leaving home, but the girls at Cluthers would be eagerly awaiting their return, and for a day or so, even Una would find things interesting. Mehitable dreaded the time when the novelty of being back had gone, and Una began again to fret and to fight against being at Cluthers. She had

kept Robin's remarks a secret, meaning to tell Una when they were back again at school, some dreary afternoon when her Irish friend was in one of her desperate moods. But she could not resist the fun of telling her on the train as they sped along the white countryside. Nancy was asleep and it was not quite time for the station where their tea basket would be handed in to them. *Mehitable* touched Una's arm.

"I've something to tell you," she whispered, "something Robin said about you."

Una sat bolt upright and shook *Mehitable's* arm. "Tell me right away. Tell me this instant, *Mehitable Webster*. Don't you dare to tease me," she exclaimed.

"I won't. I promise to tell you exactly what he said. You know how glad I am that you two became such good friends. I was so anxious that you should like each other, and I wasn't sure that you would, because you're both so different, but that was just what did it, Una, your being different from the girls he knows at home. He told me that. I mean he said you were different. He said you were fascinating and lovely——"

Una broke in with, "*Mehitable*—he didn't!"

"Yes, he did, Una. He said it twice. He said it that afternoon in Edinburgh and again on Christmas morning when we went for a walk. He asked me to beg you to write. He was afraid it would bore you." *Mehitable* got no further in her narrative, for Una put both her arms around her and gave her such a hug that she said "Ouch!" Una talked so fast and so excitedly that there was nothing to do but be patient and listen.

"Mehitable, he's the nicest boy I've ever met. I didn't know whether I'd tell you that I thought so, or not, but it's true, he is. He's so jolly and such fun and he has such nice brown eyes. Don't you think he has good-looking eyes, Mehitable? We seemed to be friends right away. I've never known an American boy before. I've only known the same old ones, Patrick and Miles and Hugh, and the McCarthy Gormes. But as cousins and brothers they don't really count, of course, and a few shooting friends of Pat's, but no one at all 'different,' as Robin is. Isn't it all wonderful and interesting, Mehitable, to think we met in Edinburgh and at Christmas time and just before he went to the war. It's like a book, isn't it, Mehitable ——"

Nancy woke up with a start, yawned and stood up. "You've been talking nineteen to the dozen, Una. I could hear your voice in my sleep. You'd better shut the window, it's cold. And take hold of this end of the table. We'll put it out. It's time for tea."

CHAPTER XII

LANGFRAI SHOWS HOSPITALITY

LANGFRAI covered something soft and dark and sleepy with his woolen scarf, looked down at it a moment, anxiously, and then went out of his cave home, to the snowy wonder of the moor. He felt a comfortable flow of friendliness toward the baby fox which he had found crouching in a crag, its leg wounded by a sharp falling stone. He had taken it home and nursed it and he was glad to think that when he came back from his roaming about the moor, it would be there to welcome him with a feeble bark and the two would have their supper together, close to the fire.

Langfrai had been restless all day and he was vaguely worried about it. He had not felt this way before and he could not make it out. He had thought often of the girl from the school at the edge of the moor who had met him so unexpectedly and had come to see his home in the cave. Twice he had gone to the rock by the tarn but he had not found the books which she had spoke of leaving for him. He wanted the books more than he could say. He wanted them in a way that amazed him. It was a part of his wanting something beside the cave and the moor. A year and a half had gone by since he had run away from the house where his cousins had not wanted him, to the

moor that had always been his comfort and delight. He knew from his one friend that they had not made a great commotion for him. He had left a note saying that he was going to live his own life in his own way, and they had evidently taken it for granted that he was earning his living at some menial task, and they did not care.

It was of his two friends of the moor that he was thinking as he made his way up the steep incline which led to the top of the crags. The new friend was the girl with the odd name, *Mehitable*, and the old friend was none other than *Backbow at Cluthers*.

Langfrai drew in great breaths of the sparkling moor air, and in spite of the snow, he did not stumble nor hesitate as he ran through the white stillness.

When he came near the moor road he slackened his steps, but there was no one in sight. He went on, now walking, now pausing to look off at the rise and fall of the wind-swept country. His moor was proudly white and silver. The snow flurry had deepened and there might be a blizzard. He would love that. He gloried in all that the moor gave him, and loved it in all its changing moods.

Some one was calling. He stood still, holding his breath, listening. The call came again and this time he heard the words, "I say, come here, will you. I'm hurt. I'm over here close to the road. Can't you hear me!"

Langfrai saw the owner of the voice the next moment. He had fallen down a crag close by the rough, uneven path which went by the name of road. Langfrai was by his side in the twinkling of an eye.

"I'll help tha up, lad. Tha's had a nasty fall," he said.

The boy was about his own age or perhaps younger, at any rate, smaller. He had fair hair which was covered with snow and he winced with pain as Langfrai helped him to stand upright, though he smiled wanly. "Thanks, I'm glad you came along. I was stupid not to look where I was going. I'm on my way to Cluthers. Have you ever heard the name? It's a girls' school and it belongs to my grandmother."

Langfrai gazed at the boy in astonishment. "Th'art going to Cluthers," he repeated, holding him firmly by the arm. He noticed that he winced again and leaned heavily against him. "Th'art hurt. Tha can never get to Cluthers in this storm with th' foot in such a way!" Langfrai exclaimed.

"I must get there. It's—I've bad news," and in spite of himself, the boy's chin quivered, and Langfrai knew that it was not because of the pain in his foot. "The wire came to me. They wouldn't let me go to France. I went to the war office yesterday and begged them. It's my mother." Again his chin quivered. He looked imploringly at Langfrai. "My mother has been hurt. The trench hospital where she nursed has been shelled. I must tell my grandmother. My father sent word to me. He said I must come to her at Cluthers."

The snow fell swiftly, in a slanting silver mist and the wind whistled lustily. Langfrai had only had himself to think about in so long, that for the moment he was sorely perplexed. The boy had taken a few steps forward with his aid and had been obliged to

stop. There was no question of his reaching Cluthers that night, and it would not be easy to take him as far as the cave, but that unquestionably must be his refuge for the night. In the midst of his quandary, Langfrai could not help feeling a glow of comfort at the thought of a comrade in the cave home which he loved so well. There was no use in being bewildered. Something must be done at once.

"Tha must come with me. There's no other way. I'll see that there's word sent to Cluthers. I'll take it myself. It's a fair way there, too far for tha poor foot. I'm Langfrai Muir. I live in a cave near by. Will tha do me the favor to keep my home a secret? I've no wish that folk shall know of it." Langfrai asked the question anxiously, even in the midst of the storm in the heart of the moor and with the boy leaning heavily against him. His companion gave a little laugh.

"I'll not tell, of course. But I *must* go on. You must help me. My name is Philippe de Villiers," he said. He had a slightly foreign voice with a decided English accent and the combination gave a quaint turn to his words.

"Tha cannot go to Cluthers, I tell tha. It's a good four mile from here. Tha must come with me. I told tha I'd get the word through for tha," he said firmly, and the boy nodded.

"Right," he said briefly. "Let's go on then."

They made slow progress against the wind and were obliged to stop and rest every few minutes because of the pain in Philippe's leg. Langfrai was thinking busily as they walked. The boy with the foreign voice

was game enough but his leg was shaking under him. He must manage somehow to reach the cave and then the next thing was to cross the moor to Cluthers, with the news for Philippe's grandmother.

It seemed hours before they came to the top of the cliffs which led to Langfrai's retreat. "It won't be easy for tha from now on but if tha'll just hold on to me tight I can manage." Langfrai had to shout, for the wind seemed to shriek by them, as it nearly took them off their feet.

Langfrai's quick eyes and his almost uncanny knowledge of every nook and cranny of the cliffs stood by him as they made the slow descent. At last they found themselves at the mouth of the cave and the next minute the blaze of the fire greeted them. Something else greeted them, too. It was the wistful whine of the baby fox. The whine changed to a sharp bark as they came up to the fire. Langfrai helped Philippe down on to the rug and took off his wet coat for him. The cave was cosy, in spite of the storm, and Philippe looked about him in amazement. "Well, I'm blown," he said. Then they both laughed. "That's the first time I've laughed since the news came. The wire said 'not serious.' Do you think they were putting the truth?" Philippe caught Langfrai's arm as he spoke. "They would have said more than that if there was any danger, wouldn't they?"

Langfrai was piling wood on to the fire. He turned and faced Philippe, not answering his question, but exclaiming, "It's the war!" It was as though he realized it for the first time, and as he stood there in the firelight, his face changed. Curiosity, interest,

something akin to fear which was as yet not fear, seemed to hold it. Then as though remembering suddenly the dire trouble of the stranger he had rescued, he dropped the piece of wood which he held, and came across to Philippe, looking down at him anxiously and saying: "I feel for tha and I hope tha'll have better word soon. I'll make tha more tea and then I'd best be going across the moor."

Philippe half rose impatiently, but sank down again. "I don't want any tea. I just want to get word to grandmother. It's ever so decent of you to say you'll go for me. What was it you said your name is?"

"Langfrai," his host replied. Then, lifting the small, dark object from the box by the fire, he held him so that Philippe could see him.

"What in the name of monkeys is that!" Philippe sat bolt upright, staring down at the little animal who blinked up at him mildly.

"He's a young fox. He had a tumble like you," Langfrai explained.

"So you took him in just as you did me. Well, we're both much obliged." Philippe looked at Langfrai curiously, and his young host saw the look.

"Th'art wondering about me. Th'art thinking that it's very strange that I live way off here alone. It is something that tha cannot understand," Langfrai said.

Philippe nodded, "I was wondering, and I think it's jolly—or that it would be, for a while. But do you stay here all the time? Don't you ever see any one or do anything but just roam around?"

Langfrai went over to a corner of the cave, returning with a huge armful of wood which he deposited

on the rough stone ground. Then he came back again and hesitated a moment before he spoke. "There's some one I know at Cluthers. It's old Back-bow, the gardener there. He used to be my father's servant. It will be easier for me to give him the message to-night if you can keep your patience a little longer. I can stay then with you here for a while longer and see that you have your supper before I go," he said.

Philippe settled down in the rugs, putting his injured foot out in front of him. "That's good. I'm ever so much obliged to you for doing all this. I don't think there's much the matter with my foot. It's just a sprain," he answered.

Langfrai seemed relieved. "That's well. I shall cook our supper now and we can sit close to the fire and eat it," he said, stooping to cover the baby fox which he had put back in the little box bed.

The next hour was the strangest that Philippe de Villiers had ever known, a part of the unusualness of his life of the past few days, since he had heard of his mother's being hurt. He had never met a boy like Langfrai before and he listened to all that he said with great amazement. Here was a boy who looked like something that might have been bred and raised in the heart of the moor, a very spirit of the moor with much of its wild beauty, a boy dressed in strange garments, living in a cave, seeing none of his fellow beings, yet who read "*Cyrano de Bergerac*" in the original and loved books with all the passion of his soul!

Langfrai had been shy at first, saying little, but busying himself for their comfort. He had made a

sort of porridge of meal and hot water which he heated in a pail over the fire. This he fed to the fox, who seemed to enjoy it immensely and who cheered Philippe so much that he laughed out loud. "Isn't he a jolly little beggar. I'll take great care of him while you go to Cluthers. He's lots of company, isn't he? You must be glad you found him!" he exclaimed.

"I'm glad I found you both," Langfrai answered simply. They had their supper of bacon and tea by the fire and before they had finished the simple meal, they had begun a real acquaintance and Philippe knew a little why Langfrai had run away. "Th' moor was better than folks," he had explained simply.

They were soon talking together, Langfrai listening while Philippe told him of the war; of its having started when he was in Belgium and of his having escaped in a motor car with a friend of his, an American girl who was a pupil at Cluthers. He told him of much that he did not know and answered his eager questions. It seemed incredible that any boy living in the North of England, could be so ignorant of half a world at war.

Philippe grew more and more amazed as he realized how different Langfrai was from the boys he knew. He watched him tend the baby fox, talking to it in a low crooning voice. He let him rub his ankle with some liniment which old Backbow had given him and marveled at his way of managing there in the rocky cavern. He liked him more and more. He felt taken out of himself and cheered, in spite of his anxiety.

Langfrai drew his coat about his shoulders, fastening it at the throat, but he threw back his head and

laughed when his guest suggested that he wear his cap, as he started on his walk to Cluthers.

"The wind ran away with it and I've never had another. Old Backbow said he would buy me one at the nearest village, but I don't want one." Langfrai came up to Philippe, and laid his hand on his shoulder. "I trust tha not to tell that Backbow's my friend. It might make trouble for him. Those that might think they had a right to make a cry about my running away might blame him sorely for being in the secret," he said solemnly.

"I promise," Philippe answered solemnly. Suddenly he thought that this was the sort of adventure his old friend, Mehitable, would enjoy and spoke impulsively. "I've a friend at Cluthers, the American girl I was telling you about, the one who escaped with me in the motor car in Belgium. She would love your cave. She would call it an adventure. If there's one thing on earth that Mehitable adores, it's an adventure."

Langfrai stood facing him, his eyes aglow, his bright hair tossed about his eager face. "Mehitable!" he exclaimed. "I know Mehitable. I met her on the moor one day, and she came to tea!"

Philippe de Villiers leaned back against the rough wall of the cave and laughed. "Well, *I'm dashed!*" he said, "if that isn't like Mehitable! Of course she's seen you and your cave! I might have known she would." Then his face went suddenly so grave that Langfrai ran across to him, thinking that he was suddenly faint. Philippe caught his arm, speaking so earnestly that his voice shook, "Listen, Langfrai," he said, "my mother has not been dangerously wounded.

I am sure of that because, besides the war office wire, I had one from my father and he never lies. But Mehitable must not know, not suddenly. Do you understand?" His brows knit with the pain of his foot and the anxiety that tormented him. "Mehitable should not know until I am there to reassure her," he muttered.

"She was a brave lass, I'm sure of that. She'd be able to hear a bad report and keep her heart," Langfrai said gently.

"She must not know it suddenly. Mehitable—well, you see Mother is a wonderful thing to her, sort of a dream. Whatever you do, Langfrai," he called as his host went toward the mouth of the cave, "whatever you do, don't let Mehitable know about it suddenly."

CHAPTER XIII

UNA RUNS AWAY

WHILE Langfrai had been rescuing Philippe and they were becoming acquainted in the hospitality of the cave, Una was in one of her "moods." For a week after their return from Scotland, she had been in the best of spirits, delighting in talking over the holiday and never tiring of the subject of Robin. The past few days had been so stormy that they could not go out and she had moped in corners at recreation and had refused to see the bright side of anything, in spite of Mehitable's efforts to cheer her.

There was a particular reason for Una's mood and Mehitable knew it and it worried her. José was becoming more and more dependent on Mehitable for comfort and friendship, and since the girl's return from Ayr, Mehitable had not known quite what to do about it. José wanted her to walk and talk with her at recreation every day, and there was something so pathetic in the way she seemed to brighten when they went off to the attic to talk about Margot and the possibility of Robin's helping to find her, that Mehitable had not the heart to refuse, although she saw that Una was growing more and more annoyed at their being together so much. If only she could have confided José's secret to Una, it would have made a great dif-

ference, but José had not liked Una from the first and she would not listen to the idea. Mehitable was uneasy about the whole affair and as she stood at their bedroom window, looking out at the fast falling snow, that night after coming up from prayers, she resolved to overlook Una's coldness of the last day or two, and tell her at least that there was a reason connected with the tragedy of the war which made her feel that she must help José all that she could.

As she stood there gazing at the white world outside and longing to be out in the snow, Una came into the room. Mehitable turned, holding out her hand. "Come and watch the snow. It's simply absurd of Madame, not to let us go out and run about in it. I've been brought up in snow, so to speak, and I adore it! We should have had a snowball fight at rec."

"You seem content enough with your beloved José," remarked Una. She sat down at her dressing table and began to brush out her hair. It fell about her white face in sweeps of ash gold with a glimmer of fire. "I never would have thought you'd be so changeable, Mehitable, you of all people. At the Château I was your friend. Now, as all the world knows, it's José. I wish you joy of her. She must be about as cheerful a friend as a gravestone! She's a snippy, spoiled girl. She——"

"That's not true, Una. She's had greater trouble than you and I can ever know—she——" Mehitable spoke excitedly, being angry, herself. Una broke in on her words.

"Bunkum! She's lost her home and so have thousands of others. I may lose mine any time. Who

knows? She's won you over. You're changed, Mehitable. You've left one friend for another. You've——"

This time it was Mehitable who broke in with, "Una, it's not true."

Una brushed her hair savagely. "Yes, it is. I hate everything and I'm through with it all. You can have your José and do as you like for the rest of your life. I've said all along that I would not tolerate this beastly school and I mean it. You needn't try to smooth me down, Mehitable, because you can't this time. Anyway, you don't care what I do!"

Mehitable turned from the window, her hands clasped. "Oh, Una," she gasped, "it's wicked to talk that way. It's——" she stopped suddenly and Una stood up, facing her, the bright halo of her hair shining in the twilight dusk. Una's hair seemed fairly to whirl and snap about her face. Suddenly Mehitable remembered something which Una's brother, Miles, had said the spring before. "Una's the best of the lot of us, unless she's in one of her tantrums. We all give her a wide berth, then!"

Mehitable turned and looked out at the silver stretch of moor, tears blinding her eyes. Una had accused her of doing the one thing she most despised, and that was being false to a friend.

The door was opened and shut suddenly, and Nancy stood before them shivering in her thick, gray bathrobe. "You're daft, Mehitable, standing there by the window to-night," she remarked as she jumped into bed. "I like a cold bath in the morning, but it's nothing short of heathenish not to have hot water at

night," she went on, drawing her red coverlet close up to her chin.

An hour later Nancy was dreaming of home, a home grown suddenly attractive, for a girl with brown hair in a blue frock and a girl with gold hair and a black velvet frock were singing carols with the Twilltrees around an old piano, and a boy with brown eyes laughed across at them!

Mehitable, too, was asleep, worn out with quiet crying. Una sat up in bed suddenly, listening. It was always difficult to make out whether or not Mehitable were asleep. Una waited, listening for some time. Then she crept out of bed and began cautiously to put on her clothes. This was the end, the last straw. She had quarreled with her best friend and she had no further use for Cluthers. She had always hated it. Now it could never be the same again. It seemed suddenly a gray, menacing shadow, bringing out the worst in her. A letter from Molly was under her pillow. Molly was at 52 Bedford Square. A taxi from Euston would bring her there in twenty minutes. She had money enough to go comfortably. There was a train early in the morning from the nearest town, straight across the moor. She knew, because she had asked Backbow. Her dressing case was light but would hold all she would need. She thought all this over quickly as she dressed. She packed some things hastily in her dressing case, put on her green velvet cap, woolen gloves and squirrel coat and then stood for a moment, uncertainly, in the middle of the room.

There was only silence, broken by the soft breathing of the two sleepers. Una tiptoed across to Mehi-

table's bed and looked down at her. She lay with her head in the curve of her arm, her face hidden in the pillow. Suddenly it seemed to Una that whatever happened, she could not leave Mehitable without a word. She was still angry, but the white heat of her fury had abated enough for her to feel misery as she stood looking down at her friend. Would Mehitable ever forgive her? Would she content herself with this José? Una moved softly across the room, found her electric flash by a pile of books and a tangle of worsted in her dresser drawer and going over to her bed, sat down on edge of it. She drew a pencil out of the pocket of her squirrel coat, tore a sheet from the copy book on the table by her bed, and wrote.

"I'm going to London. I didn't mean all I said. I'll write. Una."

She put the note on the table by Mehitable's bed, listened again, and then crept as silently as creaking boards would permit, out of the room, down the backstairs to the side door which led to the garden. She drew the bolt and stepped out into the frosty night. The snow had ceased and moonlight touched the garden, making odd patches of light among the shadows.

She thought of Madame as she made her swift way across the moor and realized uneasily that she should have left some word with her. Mehitable would have to tell her, but the note would exonerate her from any blame in the matter. In her tense, highly strung condition she did not sense the absurdity of what she was doing and her humor had deserted her. She realized vaguely that Madame would be furious and that she would never be allowed to return, but this fact did

not trouble her for the moment. Nothing seemed to matter except that she had quarreled with Mehitable, and that she longed to get away from it all.

It was only a little after ten and the train did not leave until one. She could walk the distance easily. She was so lithe and light that it seemed as though her feet scarcely touched the ground. She made up her mind that she would rest at the tarn and she did not slacken her steps until she came in sight of it at the top of the knoll. It had been wonderful, that flight across the moor. She had gloried in it. Her wild mood was a part of the night. She had not thought of herself as Una O'Hara, but as one of her ancestors, flying across the plains to the side of her liege lord, to do battle with him if necessary, against all the enemies of Ireland!

As she came close to the tarn, she felt quiet for the moment, with the uplifted sense which the tarn seemed to give to those who loved it. Mehitable's tarn—there was no use in thinking about that. Una brushed the thought away from her. She had taken the step and there was no turning back now. As she stood there looking down into the cold, still water, its surface touched with a faint film of silver, Una felt a loneliness that for the moment seemed more than she could bear.

"The tarn whispers." That was what Mehitable had said. Suddenly the silence of the moor was broken by a sound that might have been the laughter of a fairy and, in spite of the film of frost, there was something that seemed like spring, hovering near, a faint woodsy fragrance. Una cried out as she saw some one

watching her from the other side of the tarn, a boy in a brown cloak. She saw him clearly, and as she stared across at him, he came around the edge of the tarn and stood near her, as though not quite knowing whether to speak to her or not. She saw that he wore no cap and that his hair gleamed in the starlight. It was Langfrai, and for a moment he had thought that the girl he saw might be *Mehitable*. Then to his disappointment he realized that it was a stranger. She must be a *Cluthers'* girl. Langfrai did not pause to wonder what she could be doing by the tarn at that time of night, but going up to her, said a little timidly, "If you please, do you know *Mehitable Webster*?"

Una started back, her hand at her heart, her eyes fixed upon Langfrai in blank astonishment. Who was this boy who appeared suddenly out of the very heart of the moor, asking for *Mehitable*? It was small wonder that for a moment she could scarcely speak. "Yes, she's my roommate," she said at last. "She's my dearest friend," she went on, and her voice choked on the words.

"That is well for I've a message for her, a very important message, and one that will bring trouble to her," Langfrai answered.

Una broke in quickly. "I can't take a message for I'm not going back," she said.

"Not going back!" Langfrai repeated. "Do you mean you've run away?"

"If you put it that way—yes. What is the trouble? What do you mean about a message?" Una turned and faced Langfrai. She had a long walk before her and

she must be starting on, but she must find out what this strange boy meant and how he knew Mehitable.

By way of answer, Langfrai repeated his question, "Are you running away?" There was consternation in his voice and it deepened Una's curiosity.

"I've told you that I'm not going back. Don't you see that I cannot, now that I have gone away like this at night?" Her voice shook as she spoke and for the first time, something like fear touched her. "I'm going on to take the train for London," she said.

"You can't. You must not." Langfrai came up close to her. "Philippe's mother is wounded. He came from London to tell his grandmother, and he hurt his ankle. He's in my care and I'm taking a message to Cluthers. He said that Mehitable must be told gently. You are her friend. You must go back to her."

"Young Madame!" Una stared at him as though hardly comprehending what he had said. "Young Madame—Philippe—he's with you!" Young Madame wounded! It was unthinkable! Pity for Mehitable was the only emotion that she knew, for a moment. "Don't you see that I must go on? It's too late!" Una caught her breath with a sob.

"Art tha Una O'Hara? I heard of tha from Mehitable. Th' father fought in the Boer war. He was a hero. Tha can be as brave as he," Langfrai said gently.

Una caught her breath, but although she threw back her head in the old, proud way, she felt suddenly less a heroine than a naughty child. "Yes, I know.

I see it that way now. It seems cowardly to run away." She put her head down for a moment. "I'll go back to Cluthers," she said, and her voice sounded like a whisper, there by the listening stillness of the tarn.

CHAPTER XIV

"YOU ARE MY BEST FRIEND, NEXT TO BARBIE"

MEHITABLE woke suddenly and sat up in bed, the damp moor wind blowing about her shoulders. As she turned to lie down again she saw the folded note on the table beside her bed. The moonlight streamed into the room, and the next instant she saw that Una's bed was unoccupied. She picked up the note, read it in a flash; before she had finished the last word she was out of bed, and almost before she could think, she was dressed. As silently as Una had done, she crept out of the room and down the stairs. Her limbs were heavy and she breathed with difficulty. She had felt this way when she had escaped with Philippe in the motor from Belgium.

She thought rapidly. How long had Una been gone? She could run like a deer. There would be no chance of overtaking her on the moor, but there was a possibility of reaching the station before the arrival of the London train. That was what she must do and that was her overwhelming desire as she opened the side door and stepped out into the garden.

She ran across the vegetable garden and on toward the moor which seemed to hold out white arms to her. It was better not to think, just to run. Now and then she stopped for a moment to rest, breathing quickly.

All about her was the white delight of her moor, with its opal hollows, blue shadows, and mystery.

The tarn—she would soon see the tarn. There was a vague comfort in the thought and as she sped on toward it, her thought reached out to it. As she neared it, she slackened her steps. How wonderful—there it was, shining tranquilly, as though there were no quarrels or runaways in the world.

What was that? Some one moving by the tarn, two figures, black against the startling white of the moorland. She stopped still, holding her breath, and as she recognized her friend, she ran forward with a cry, straight to Una who put both arms around her. "Una, you're my dearest friend, next to Barbie," she sobbed.

"Young Madame," Una began, but *Mehitable* interrupted her.

"That's different. Young Madame is sort of everything, like a mother and a friend."

Una turned to *Langfrai*, "Oh, *Mehitable*, he says he knows you. He's made me see that I must go back to *Cluthers*." The two girls turned and faced *Langfrai*, their arms still about each other and it was as though *Mehitable* had seen him for the first time.

"The moor boy, isn't it strange. I'm so glad Una met you. I thought I'd be too late to overtake her on the moor. We're both going back!"

There was no time to lose. Some one might have heard them moving about. Already they may have been found missing. *Mehitable* caught Una's arm, her one thought being for their speedy return to *Cluthers*. She spoke again to *Langfrai*, "I haven't forgotten the books. We haven't been allowed out

on the moor because of the storms. I'll bring them soon." Someway it seemed quite natural to her that Langfrai should be there with them by the tarn. He was so much a part of her thought of the moor.

"I'll take tha both back to Cluthers. I've a message there for old Backbow. He sleeps in the stable close to the vegetable garden. When th'rt both safe inside, I'll wake him."

The three stood silently for a moment and then Una said again, "Young Madame—Mehitable there's bad news and I don't know how to tell you, but it is this: Young Madame's been hurt. It's not serious. Philippe came to tell his grandmother and hurt his ankle crossing the moor. This boy rescued him and he's on his way now to leave the word with Backbow." Una spoke so quickly that her words ran into each other. She could not think, in her excited condition, of any easy way to break the news to her friend. She was frightened at Mehitable's white face and the odd way her freckles seemed to stand out.

Mehitable turned from Una to Langfrai, as though dumbly asking him to deny Una's words. He put out his hand timidly. "Is it true," he said gently. "Your friend, Philippe, is with me in the cave. He says that his father wired that his mother's hurt was not serious and that his father never lies."

Almost mechanically the three moved away from the tarn. Mehitable looked back at it wistfully. It shone blue, under the moon. It seemed to her, for the first time, unfriendly. They sped quickly across the moor, not running, but walking with long rapid strides, and it seemed to Mehitable as though sorrow

and fear walked with them. The thought uppermost in Una's mind, in spite of her great pity for *Mehitable*, was whether or not they had been missed. *Mehitable* would be without blame. Whatever *Madame* might say or do, one thing was certain, *Mehitable* must not suffer. This became the dominate emotion to Una as they neared the *Cluthers* from which she had so little time ago tried to make an escape.

Mehitable was suffering. Una knew that, as they hurried on. Whatever might happen as to the outcome of her own mad act, *Mehitable* would have sorrow. Una glanced at her anxiously. *Mehitable* looked neither to the right nor left and seemed scarcely to heed the fact that *Langfrai* and her roommate walked beside her. She was thinking for the moment only of Young *Madame*. There was no one like her in all the world, no one.

They were nearing the edge of the moor and *Cluthers* rose darkly against the pale, star-lit sky. *Langfrai* stopped, and the other two stopped with him. "Listen," he said. "Tha must go on through the garden alone. It is better so. I'll watch in the shadow until tha has shut the garden door and then I shall go to wake *Backbow* and give him the news. Tha wilt be told it to-morrow, no doubt, and in the meantime, remember tha has no word of it." Tears glistened in *Langfrai's* eyes as he saw *Mehitable's* face. "Th'rt true to tha friends," he said. He looked at Una after speaking and then back again at *Mehitable*. "Tha friend came back for tha sake. She, too, is true," he said, and then before either of them could speak, he had disappeared in the shadows.

Cluthers loomed ahead of them. There was something frightening about it. There were no lights, and this gave them a sudden feeling of thankfulness. There would be sure to be lights, if their absence had been found out. They made their way across the garden and it was only the work of a second to open the garden door which they had left unlocked. When Una drew the bolt in place it made a grating sound, and for a moment they stood in the entry, listening, their hearts pounding. Then they crossed the hall and ascended the stairs, pausing at each step or so. Now and then a board would creak with a sound which seemed to their frightened senses like the report of a pistol.

They reached their room at last and stood shivering in the air that blew in from the open window, standing in the shadow so that Nancy, if she woke, could not see them. It seemed to them both that they could not bear to make explanations to any one just then. They sat down on the side of Mehitable's bed, their arms about each other, and for the first time in her life, Una forgot absolutely everything that had to do with her own wild, charming, impulsive self. All the love which she had for her friend came then to her aid, and her tender, whispered words of comfort were very sweet to Mehitable.

CHAPTER XV

MEHITABLE'S DIARY

MEHITABLE dropped two soft pillows on the floor back of an old horsehair trunk in a corner of the attic. They belonged on the couch downstairs, and she smiled as she thought of Madame's horror had she known that they were gracing a corner of the attic. She sat down on one pillow and arranged the other at her back, against the side of the trunk. The wan light from a narrow, arched window just above her fell full upon her. Just beyond was dusk and the outlines of dim shapes and strange figures which were, in reality, only clothes horses, trunks, and cast off furniture.

She drew her cloak up about her knees and taking a freshly sharpened, soft lead pencil from her pocket, began to write in her diary.

"I've wanted to be alone with you diary, for ages, but it hasn't seemed possible to manage. I've never wanted so much to write in you, since I've had you, as I do to-day. I want you to know my very heart, the deep things that I cannot say to any one. Life is strange, enthralling. I want words to express what I mean about life. During the past month I've felt like some one just awakened, and I seem to feel it more than ever to-day. Perhaps it is because there is a faint film of green over the moor.

Oh, I'm going to see the moor in the spring—yet I know that this feeling I have to-day is more than just the thought that spring is almost here.

“My beloved friends, how many there are! Young Madame who is so much better that she is soon coming to London, Barbie, Una, Robin, Johnny, Langfrai, Philippe, José—how their lives seem like a network of black and gold about me. I am waiting always for some one of them to surprise and delight me. Sometimes they sadden me, and I sadden them. Barbie thinks that I am growing away from her. I know that she does. She suffers because she thinks that our lives are so different, but no lives are really different at the heart of them, where there is love. Her life and mine will always be each a part of the other.

“The night by the tarn seems a thousand years ago or as though it never could have been. It was the strangest time I have ever known, first, our quarrel, then waking and finding the note, then creeping through the house. I shall never forget how my heart beat! I prayed that God wouldn't let any one wake up. Finding Una and Langfrai there in the blue moonlight, hearing that terrible word that Young Madame was wounded, then our going back across the moor and the relief when we saw that Cluthers was dark and at last our reaching our room in safety.

“Everything seems different since that night. It was as though we had drifted along, and suddenly everything came together. Una has been different since that night and we're the real friends that I was almost afraid we weren't going to be. Una is strange and bewitching. She is like her long-ago ancestors,

and it is a glorious thing to know that we are forever and forever to be friends, and that misunderstandings can't change us. Una feels this, too. She says she's known it ever since that night by the tarn. It was as though the tarn had spoken to her. She says she knew how much our friendship meant when she was running away across the moor, and when Langfrai told her about Young Madame, she knew that she could not desert me.

"The first few days after we had the news about Young Madame were dreadful ones, for we kept looking for telegrams and worrying, but Una stayed right by me, and she was so sort of humble and sweet. Old Backbow is clever. I always thought so, though he never says much, but now I know it. He can manage Madame better than any one. She never has known where Philippe spent the night, after he hurt his ankle. Oh, I can see them arriving now, old Backbow's cart bumping across the moor and Philippe sitting up beside him on the front seat. Poor Madame fussed so frightfully all day; I tried to help her and I felt guilty for all the rules I've broken and the many times I've deceived her. What would she say if she knew of the time when the moor called me and I forgot her and every one and went on and on. What would she say if she knew about Langfrai and the cave! What would she say if she knew that Una had left that way in the night, and that Langfrai had seen us across the moor! Oh, life is wonderful, enchanting. Even the sorrow of it has a charm. Sadness and beauty ought not to go together, but sometimes it seems as though they do. There is a sadness to me about the faint film

of green across the moor. It makes me think of all the loves that the world has known, the wistful dreams, the joy that seems too great to bear and the grief that no words can tell.

"I've absolutely forgiven Madame for her attitude about Philippe, but she might have let us see something of each other, knowing all that we've been through together. How odd it was of her, getting a room for him in the vicarage and being so prim and formal about him. He was so bored as soon as he knew that his mother was all right that he just wouldn't stay. We only had that little talk together after the Saturday night concert. The girls stared at him so frightfully. He said to me, 'Mehitable, I wouldn't go through another evening like this for a hundred pounds.' It is too bad that he and his grandmother do not agree at all about anything. He only stayed a week and went before the Doctor said his sprained ankle was ready to be walked on. Poor Madame found that he simply would not be 'tied to her apron strings,' as he expressed it. They really love each other, but they quarrel. Dear me, it does seem such a pity. It's like Una and me before the night she ran away.

"I'd rather write about the moor than about people, to-day, although I think people are intensely interesting. I have thoughts about the tarn that I can hardly tell you, dear diary. They are almost as absurd as a seventeen-year-old girl believing in fairies. Everything is waking on the moor, and I feel something within me awakening, too."

Mehitable scowled up at the window. The light had waned and it was impossible to see to scribble

another line. She rose stiffly, yawned and stepped over a doll's trunk. Madame had rented Cluthers with all that it contained, and Mehitable often wondered what the family had been like who had lived there on the edge of the wildest moor in Yorkshire. The tiny village just beyond them did not boast of more than a dozen houses, a shop or two, and a tiny church. Una was right when she said that they were out of the way of the world. "That is just what makes it all so interesting," Mehitable thought. "Things happen just the same, wonderful things, like the moor waking up, and Una and I meeting at night by the tarn and learning the depth of our friendship, and strangest of all, Langfrail!" As she thought of him, Mehitable stopped a minute, thinking quickly. She was crossing the attic and as she made a decision, she ran quickly downstairs, into her room, and putting on her jacket and tam, went out, running across the garden.

It was a holiday afternoon and Una and the hockey devotees were busy practising for a match with the girls' school nearest to Cluthers. Their voices rang clearly from a neighboring field and Miss Derk's crisp directions could be heard plainly. She had been a fine hockey player in her day and had been given charge of the team. Mehitable had caught up two books from the table by her bed, and as she walked briskly along, she glanced at them, wondering if Langfrail would care for them. Ever since the night when she had met him with Una by the tarn, she had gone at intervals with books, leaving them in the craggy bit of rock at the end of the tarn. Twice she had had a hastily scrawled note of thanks from him. It was all

very exciting and unusual and it was even more interesting to her now that Una and Philippe were in the secret. When Madame had questioned her grandson as to his night's shelter on the moor he had told her simply that a boy had found him and taken him to his home. Madame was so vague about the moor, never venturing near it herself, that it was not difficult to put her off with some casual explanation. Una had told Langfrai that she would remain silent about him, and except to Mehitable, she had never mentioned the odd boy who had appeared in the moonlight, like a messenger from the tarn itself.

Mehitable reached the tarn, and finding some returned books, knelt down and put the new ones in their place. The returned ones were "A Singular Life," one of the favorites she had brought from Cherryville and "Alice in Wonderland" which Langfrai had said that he had never read, and Anthony Hope's "Prisoner of Zenda." There was a note with the books and Mehitable sat down by the tarn to read it. It said: "I know that Thursday is your holiday and I shall be near the tarn, and if you are alone I will see you and come to speak with you. I have something to tell you." Mehitable sat waiting for Langfrai, the note in her hand, looking off at the frail, green covering of the moor and with a quickened sense of delight noting the vague shimmer of rose and purple that was taking the place of grays and browns. As so often happened when she was by the tarn, the sun came out suddenly from the black clouds which had been hiding it, and the next moment, Langfrai appeared, coming quickly around the side of the tarn. There was something

about him that was different. Mehitable felt it as soon as she saw him, a determination, as though he had come to a decision. After he had spoken a few words, she knew what that decision was.

Mehitable always kept her "pictures" as she called her thoughts of the tarn in after years. They never left her and she could always conjure them up when she liked and could live in the delight of them, a delight not untinged with sadness, and of all the "pictures" the one of that late afternoon, with the sweetness of freshly growing things wafted to them from the moor and the sun making gold splashes on the still water, was the dearest.

Langfrai spoke to her with some of his old shyness but he was so in earnest about what he wanted to tell her that he soon forgot himself. Having lived so alone for the past year and a half it was confusing for him to put his thoughts into words. "I'm glad tha came. I thought tha would come to-day but I feared some of th' friends would come with tha and that I'd have no chance for a word. Mehitable Webster, I am going away. I am leaving my home." Langfrai turned his face away from her as he spoke.

"Going away," she repeated. "Tell me, Langfrai, why are you going? I am your friend. I want to know." Mehitable leaned forward, her hand on the cold, pebbly ground. "I was right when I wrote in my diary that things happen here just the same as anywhere, things more interesting than in the world," she thought.

Langfrai spoke slowly and with some difficulty. "I don't know as I can explain to you, but you understand

better than any one. Philippe didn't. He tried to act as though he did but I know he thought it was mad, living off alone on the moor this way. He told me so many things that I did not know. He told me about the war and that although he's only sixteen he has war work to do in London. Suddenly I felt as though I'd been asleep, just thinking of myself, not caring about anything but myself since father's death. I thought about it night after night, and finally I went to old Backbow late one night and talked it all out with him."

Mehitable interrupted. "I've wanted to talk to him, too, and to tell him that I knew you, and I didn't because it was our secret."

Langfrai nodded. "He is my only friend besides you. He loved my father and he does not love my cousins in Glasgow. He has been a servant in our family for many years. He was with us when father died. The three of us were always happy. There was only a little money, but we did not mind. I had twenty-five pounds when I left Glasgow and Backbow has kept it for me. He says he knew that some day I would tire of the cave. It is enough to take me to London and to keep me for a bit until I can find work. When I heard of the lady, Philippe's mother, being wounded and of all the things that Philippe told me, I knew that I must not live this way any longer. I knew there must be something I could do to help. I was asleep, Mehitable, and I suddenly woke up."

Mehitable nodded, tears in her eyes. It was difficult for her to speak, even to write in her diary, about Young Madame's narrow escape from death, and when

Langfrai spoke of "the lady, Philippe's mother," she knew what he meant about feeling that he must do something, no matter what, to help. She herself had told no one of the conflict in her thought. There were times when it seemed as though, like Una, she must be doing something active to help in the war, but unlike Una her desire was not the outcome of a wish to leave Cluthers, for she loved it deeply because of the moor and the tarn. She turned to Langfrai, speaking impulsively. "I'm glad. You seem such a part of the moor and I know how you love it, but there are people, too, millions of them, and they need help. When are you going?"

"To-morrow. Backbow is coming with the cart to take my books and the few belongings and 'Scrappy'—he's a baby fox I had with me." Langfrai hesitated. "I'd like you to have Scrappy. Backbow is going to keep him at Cluthers unless some one should object. You can think of him as yours, if you like." Langfrai smiled at Mehitable, and as he sat there by the tarn with his bright hair blowing about his face, she thought that he was more beautiful than any human being that she had ever seen, but it was more as a strange and lovely picture or poem that she thought of him. He stood up, and after a moment, she jumped to her feet and faced him.

There was a sound of voices. Some of the girls had evidently finished their game and were out for a walk. The sound was fairly far off, but they would soon reach the tarn.

"Langfrai, when shall I see you again? Where are you to be? I will write to Miss Meadows and she

will help you. She is soon to be in London and is an American friend of mine, doing war work. Promise me that you will get in touch with her. You can find her at the Russell Hotel in Russell Square. Why, you've never been in London—what will you do?" Mehitable's voice trembled as she spoke.

"I will remember Miss Meadows at the Russell, in Russell Square. I will write to tha and th'rt my friend. It is as it was meant to be," he tossed his hair from his forehead and smiled at her. "I would have wished to know tha well and to have talked with tha of the many books we love. Some day we shall be the friends that now I dream we are. Good-by, Mehitable."

Mehitable heard Tip's laugh in the distance, and held out her hands, but Langfrai had said his good-by and turned away. She watched him as he climbed over the knoll and disappeared.

Then she looked down deep into the tarn and whispered something to it. The words she whispered to the tarn were for it alone. We cannot know them.

CHAPTER XVI

JOSÉ COMES TO THE FEAST

MEHITABLE was so silent on the walk back to Cluthers that Tip and Fanny Trent teased her, as they sauntered across the bracken. "The tarn certainly has a charm over you, Mehitable. It has you under its thumb, so to speak. You are dreamier than ever and that, my child, is saying a good deal, after you've been mooning by its shores."

"Why don't you write a poem about the tarn, Mehitable?" Fanny asked, slipping her arm in Mehitable's.

"I have written one," Mehitable answered, wishing they would keep off the subject of the tarn for the moment, and yet not being able to resist telling them that she had created a poem about it.

"Out with it, Mehitable!" exclaimed Tip.

"Yes, go on, school poet, quick. A poem is just what I need to-day. I'm beginning to feel as though I'd turn into treacle and bread and tea and need something to inspire me," said Fanny. So as they walked along in the sweet twilight of the moor, Mehitable said her poem with a voice that trembled a little, for her heart was very full.

"THE TARN

"I saw you first when I had climbed a hill,
Holding the secrets of the moor. You seemed
Part of all the sadness of the world
Part of all that wistful hearts have dreamed.

"Star points have nestled in your silver soul,
Sunlight has touched you in its passing by,
There is no whisper that you have not heard,
Cold and inviolate underneath the sky."

"Mehitable—my, it's lovely. You're a real poet, isn't she, Tip?" Fanny patted Mehitable's shoulder.

"It's the best ever. Golly, I'm proud to think that some day I'll be known as the friend of the great poetess, Mehitable Webster. I must cherish any of your little belongings that are left about, Mehitable, though of course you never do leave anything about. Ahem! Haven't you an old toothbrush that you could give to me? It would save collecting things, later on!"

"Don't say 'poetess,' Tip. It sounds so old-fashioned and amateurish and it's never used, now. Mehitable is a poet," admonished Fanny. "I love that line, 'Cold and inviolate, underneath the sky,'" she went on, turning to Mehitable.

"You'd better stop having a mutual admiration society and hustle. Just to hurry you up a mite I'll inform you that it's almost time for the dinner gong!" called Tip, starting to run. The other two followed her at a brisk pace and they arrived breathlessly at the dining-room door as the girls came downstairs for dinner. They had left their outdoor things in the entry and had not had time to wash their hands.

"Your poem came pretty near getting us into nice hot water, Mehitable Webster," whispered Tip as they went on into the dining room.

Una, who sat on one side of Mehitable, refused roast beef languidly. She looked pale and she replied listlessly when Miss Derk asked her if she were not well. Under cover of general conversation she said to Mehitable, "Don't you think it's queer that we don't have any word from Robin, Mehitable? Personally, I'm worried. We've only had that brief note a fortnight after he left Ayr and not a word since." Una had made the same remark to her friend before, and this time Mehitable admitted that she, too, was worried.

"It isn't as though he didn't know that we're anxious to hear. I begged him to write whenever he could. He's awfully young, Una, to be in the midst of it all. If anything should happen to him, I don't know what his mother would do. Cherryville would never be the same again."

Mehitable gloomily refused a second helping of beef and entered into Una's mood so thoroughly that by the time dinner was over, they were both tragic. "Come away, Mehitable. We can walk in the entry. We little knew how lucky we were at the Château, having the *celules* to walk in. Ye gods, except for the attic it's harder here to have a private talk than it was in Paris." They crossed the living room and went on to the entry which was, in fact, a narrow hall running along one side of the garden.

Mehitable knew that the thought of Robin was uppermost in Una's mind, and she herself, when once

her anxiety about Young Madame was over, had wondered and wondered why they had heard nothing from him except a brief scrawl from Paris a few days after his arrival there. She could not think of any explanation to comfort Una except that he must be somewhere inaccessible to the sending of letters. The two girls walked up and down for some time, not being disturbed by any one until José made her appearance, walking, as was her custom, alone. Una groaned under her breath when she saw her, but gave *Mehitable's* arm a little squeeze as she turned away. "I'll let you two have one of your mysterious confabs for a while. We'll talk more about Robin later on," she whispered, and she ran back into the living room. She had been different in her attitude toward the Belgian girl since the strange night when she had run away, and knowing from *Mehitable* that José had a secret grief, had tried to overcome her dislike of the girl's coldness.

José had never changed her attitude toward the *Cluthers* girls. She had never tried in any way to make friends with them. She rarely spoke to any of them beyond a polite good morning. *Mehitable* was the only exception, and sometimes she wished, in her heart of hearts, that José was not so dependent on her. She was fond of the strange, proud girl, and her beauty and distinction made her interesting, but she was beginning to see that it was in herself that José would find the best help.

José wore her gray cape, throwing it across her shoulder as she put her arm in *Mehitable's*. Her face was as white and tense as always and there were deep shadows under her eyes. *Mehitable's* heart ached for

her, but a sense of irritation toward her was mingled with the pity. It was a terrible thing not to know what had become of one's beloved sister, but there were other people suffering in the world, others consumed with anxiety. During the week after they had had the word about Young Madame, José had come out of her shell a little and had brooded less on her own trouble, trying, in a rather feeble way, to help Mehitable, but since there was no further cause for anxiety about Mehitable's friend, she had lapsed again into a state of weary misery.

"I had a dream about my Margot last night. She was alone and bewildered. Ah, Mehitable, I thought that I should die when I awoke and knew that it was more than a dream—" José gazed out into the clear night.

"You were better when you thought of me and my trouble, José. You are not the only one in the world who has sorrow and whose heart is torn with anxiety. Una and I have our share, though I know that nothing we suffer can touch your great grief and worry. Noel Pope's brother is in the front trenches and they have not heard in weeks from him, yet you know how Noel is a comfort to all the rest of us. Una's brothers are fighting, too, and all her people in the war, yet she's been wonderful this past month. She's entered into things here and has tried to keep up her spirits and that's hard, for she's like you, José. She's so intense." Mehitable was becoming more and more intense herself as she went on. José's tragic face turned toward her in amazement. "You've never tried to meet the girls here halfway. They all wanted to be friendly from

the first, but you insulted some of them that afternoon in the attic and you've never once put yourself out for one of them, not so much as to give them a smile. Oh, José, this sounds heartless, but I've been thinking lately that you've got to be different yourself if you want to find Margot. I can't explain what I mean, but if you could just be more loving and hopeful, I feel, deep in my heart, that things would work out so much better for you. This sounds preachy, and I hate preaching, but I've just had to say all this to you. I think about it all, so much, and I don't feel that it's hopeless about Margot, only you must do your share." Mehitable stopped suddenly, aghast at what she had said. She did not dare to look at José, who walked quietly beside her, and she gave a big sigh of relief as Una ran up to them.

"Mehitable, we're going to break over to-night, and have some fun. We've done war knitting steadily now for days and to-night every one seems down and out. Noel's coming to our room and of course Tip and the others. Think up some poem or something to recite. I'm going to hunt up that jingle that Hugh wrote. It's in one of his letters. You know how we roared over it. The others haven't heard it. It's awfully safe now that Derk sleeps in the other wing." Una delivered her news in her usual breathless way, not looking at José. She had been rebuffed too many times by the Belgian girl, in any overtures that she had made, to dream of including her in the proposed good time.

The study-hour bell rang at that moment and the three made their way through groups of girls in the living room, to the schoolroom beyond. Tip was in

wild spirits at the prospect of a feast and made a row of girls laugh at prayers. She whispered to Una that she had something to bring as an offering that night and Una shrugged her shoulders sceptically. "Don't think we'll have anything to eat. That's the last thing we can expect. Mehitable was almost late coming in to prayers and she looked as guilty as could be. I must tackle that young woman and see what mischief she was up to, between study hour and prayers," Una went on, her arm through Tip's as they ascended the stairs.

Mehitable had waited until the bell for the end of study hour sounded and then she had slipped out into the garden, taking her cloak from the entry hook, before cautiously opening the door. She had crossed the garden and had knocked at Backbow's door, spoken with him, and returned in so short a time that she could scarcely realize herself that it had happened. As she brushed her thick, brown hair, listening to Una's quick chatter, she thought of old Backbow's face as it had looked when he peered out at her, and of her words and his.

"Backbow, I want to tell you that Langfrai is a friend of mine. I met him on the moor and I've given him books. There's no need of its being a secret any longer because he's leaving the cave." She had clasped her hands in her earnestness and excitement. "Oh, Backbow! there isn't any one to care what becomes of Langfrai but you and me and Philippe. I want to do something to help him. He trusts you and so do I. Promise that you will give him good advice. He knows nothing of the world. Make him promise to tell you

when his money is short." All this and more she had said to Backbow as he gazed at her in astonishment. She was so glad that she had gone that her heart was singing. Backbow had reassured her in his blunt way.

"Th' lad has a head, in spite of his queer ways. I've given him a note to my brother on the Tottenham Court Road. To-morrow I'll see that he has two good suits o' his father's clothes. He can well wear them now. Rest tha easy, lass. Langfrai will come to no harm. 'Tis time he did his share o' work." Then Backbow had done the most astonishing thing. He had gone to the side of the room and returned with a brown, shiny currant cake which he presented to *Mehitable* on a cracked, yellow plate.

"Maybe this will do for your odd meals at any hour, miss," he had said. Backbow, the disciplinarian, offering her a currant cake for a midnight feast! She was so deep in thought that Nancy had to tell her twice that she had heard from Miss Abby Twilltrees, who said that the minister was better of a sharp attack of rheumatism.

When she produced the currant cake a little later to a surprised and delighted group of her friends, she aroused the utmost curiosity.

"*Mehitable*, you must tell us. It's weird—where could you have found it?" Fanny Trent eyed it delightedly as she spoke. She was no longer blasé about anything out of the ordinary in the way of eatables and welcomed the cake with as much satisfaction as the others.

"Backbow wasn't so terribly surprised that I knew Langfrai. Perhaps he knew all the time," *Mehitable*

thought, as they spread out the nuts, apples, and cake which constituted their impromptu meal.

"Mehitable went to the tarn and wished for it, I'll bet a cooky," remarked Tip.

They were seated in a ring in the center of the room, Tip, the Warthwalls, and Fanny Trent, Mehitable, Una, and Nancy, and Jean Macy. It had been too cold all winter for parties of this kind, but the night was mild and the breeze which came in softly from the half-open window had a breath of spring.

As Tip finished speaking, Nancy raised a warning hand. "Hush, some one's coming," she whispered.

The next instant the door opened softly. They held their breath. Some one came in and closed the door without making more than a slight sound. It was José Blanc. She wore the gray cape over her dressing gown and her long, fair hair fell about the still beauty of her white face. She stood for an instant looking at them and then she said, "If you'll let me, I'd like to come and join you. I've wanted to, before, but I—I thought after the way I'd acted, you wouldn't want me. If you'll let me be friends—" her voice trembled as she said the last— "I'll be glad to come."

There was an instant's silence, and then Tip was the first to speak, "Come right along and have the seat of honor by me, José," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO TELEGRAMS

"MEHITABLE, Madame has sent for you. I've spent fifteen good minutes of rec, looking for you," Tip called as she came running up to where Mehitable and Noel were sitting on an overturned wheelbarrow, resting after watching a hockey match in the field beyond. "What's the matter with you two? You look positively glum. Yes, you'd better stir yourself, Hit. You're in for it, I daresay," Tip went on cheerfully, taking the place on the wheelbarrow which Mehitable had hastily vacated.

"Don't call Mehitable that awful name, Tip," admonished Noel, as Mehitable ran off at top speed.

A sweet, heather-scented breeze blew over Mehitable's face as she ran across the garden and in at the entry door. Madame had sent for her! That was the most important thing for the moment. She might have her worries about Langfrai, so lonely in the heart of London, of Robin from whom they had had no word since he left Paris, but for the immediate present her own trouble loomed large. She had never conquered her fear of Madame nor her shyness in the august presence.

As she mounted the stairs, she thought over hastily as many of the rules that she had broken in the past

week as she could remember. As she reached the top step, she stood still for a moment. What if Madame had learned of her friendship with Langfrai! That would mean trouble, indeed. They all knew Madame's old-fashioned ideas of propriety!

She knocked on the study door, and hearing the familiar "*Entrez*," went inside.

Madame sat at her desk, some papers in front of her. "Sit down, *enfant*. I am busy for the moment," she remarked, glancing at Mehitable as she closed the door. Mehitable went over and sat down in a chair close to the window.

The minutes passed slowly. There was no sound, but the ticking of the marble clock on the mantle and the faint scratching of Madame's pen.

Mehitable had time for thought. She was still uneasy, but felt that the situation could not be very serious and Madame could not be very angry, otherwise she would have burst out with a torrent of words. Instead, she had spoken quite kindly. There was a glimpse of the moor from the window and Mehitable caught her breath at the startling sight. The heather had deepened to rose and the golden sweep of the gorse mingled with it. The moor had lost something. Mehitable had an ache at her heart as the thought came to her. It had lost Langfrai, this moor that they both loved. Something told her that Langfrai was wanting it with all the strength of his strange nature. They had had such a brief, odd acquaintance, she and Langfrai, just those talks by the tarn, the half hour in the cave, the books hidden in the cliff. It had all been so enchanting. Langfrai was not like other boys. He had

dreams about the moor and he loved it as she did in an indefinable way; more than she did, for it was all he had, all that had made up his life since his father died.

Madame's voice broke in on her thoughts. "Mehitable, I am ready to speak with you," she said. Mehitable jumped up and came over to the desk. Madame looked at her silently for a moment. It was not a comfortable moment for Mehitable. She had been running in the wind and she was sure that her hair must be in a fly-away condition. As a matter of fact, Madame was not thinking of that. She was noticing the something about Mehitable's face, which had impressed her when she had come to ask permission to go out alone on the moor, early in the autumn. It showed her to be growing up. The look was there still and it had deepened.

"My daughter-in-law is in London. She has sent for you to come and stay with her for a fortnight and I am giving you my permission to go." Madame spoke calmly as though making the most ordinary kind of statement, and for a moment Mehitable could only stare at her blankly. Then she clasped her hands and faltered, "Oh, Madame!" She could think of no words to say. She could only stand gazing at Madame. She was being told that she could go to London to see Young Madame. She could leave her lessons in the middle of the spring term, and go!

"I am—but, Madame, are you sure that I may go?" Mehitable took hold of the side of the desk as she spoke. Amazement, doubt, and joy were in her eyes.

Madame answered briskly and without emotion. "I could hardly refuse my daughter-in-law anything at

present, after all that she has been through. I do not think it is at all wise, and I am afraid that your aunt in America will not approve, but even so I am willing to let you go up to London for a fortnight. You must promise to work very hard when you return. I will let you know what day you are to go. That is all for the present. *Entrez.*" Madame looked toward the door, as a knock sounded and a maid came into the room. Mehitable slipped out. She stood a moment on the landing. Then as the tea bell sounded shrilly, she ran downstairs, was greeted by Una and some other hockey players, and went on with them into the dining room. It was not until they were seated at the far table by the window which was their especial haunt and Noel had poured them steaming cups of tea, that Mehitable realized that she actually was going to London. Young Madame had sent for her to come to London! She caught her breath excitedly. What would they all say if she should exclaim, "I'm going to London in a few days." When one was at Cluthers, one felt as though it were for always.

Langfrai was in London and Philippe and perhaps Miss Meadows would be there before she left. London was closer to everything, closer to the war.

"We've had a good report from headquarters about the woolen things we sent. Madame is going to read the letter at tea," announced Noel, pouring some hot water into the teapot from a blue jug. "Who's ready for more tea? You are, Una, I know." Noel looked up. A maid was speaking to her. "Madame wishes to see you in her study, if you please, miss," she said. Noel rose quickly and left the room.

There was a little silence after she had gone. Then Tip remarked: "Madame seems to be in a sociable mood to-day. What was the outcome of your interview with her, *Mehitable*? You don't look as down-cast as I was afraid you might."

Mehitable smiled, but said nothing. Somehow at the moment she did not feel like telling her news. The lesson bell sounded and they went on out to the school-room. Tip was full of the hockey game and regaled *Mehitable* with a whispered account of it as they made a pretext of studying. Fanny Trent came into the schoolroom, spoke to Miss Derk, who was at the desk, and then came up to *Mehitable*. Madame wants to speak with you, *Mehitable*," she said.

Tip, who sat just behind *Mehitable*, chuckled. "You sure are popular with Madame, to-day. What's the mystery?" she whispered, as *Mehitable* crammed her books and papers into her desk, and stood up.

"What is it all about, *Mehitable*?" asked Una in so loud a voice that Miss Derk heard her and said sharply, "Silence!"

"I'll tell you later," *Mehitable* whispered as she passed Una's desk. She went on out of the school-room and closed the door. Then she ran across the living room and on out to the hall. Madame was coming down the stairs. As *Mehitable* came up to her she paused on the last step and did for her a very unusual thing. She put her arm on *Mehitable*'s shoulder and the gesture was almost like a caress.

"I have only time for a word with you, *Mehitable*. You are to leave to-night with Noel Pope. You are to travel together as far as York and she will see you

safely on the night train for London. I have had word that her brother has been killed and she is going home for a few days, at least. She seemed glad that you would be traveling with her as far as York. The young brother will meet her there." Madame was writing some message on the back of an envelope as she spoke. "You must pack at once. Take only one bag. I will send a servant to aid you. You'll have to cross the moor, for the seven o'clock train doesn't stop at the village here. Backbow will have the cart ready in less than an hour." Madame started to cross the hall, but she turned back at a sight of Mehitable's face. "Do not cry, *enfant*. It is you who must be cheerful for your friend's sake. She said that of all her school comrades, she would rather be with you. Make haste now, and be ready when Backbow drives in with the cart at half past five." Madame went on through to the front of the house and Mehitable ran upstairs.

Mehitable sighed as she rummaged in her trunk. It did seem as though everything that she possessed was in need of mending. She tucked in a copybook and some pencils for writing on the train, and hastily mended a tear in the arm of her blue Russian blouse. Every now and then she brushed her hand across her eyes, for the tears would come, in spite of Madame's counsel to be cheerful for her friend. The excitement of going to London was still with her, but the joy had gone. How was Noel bearing it? She could not bear the thought of Noel's grief. "He is my greatest friend. There is no one like him. He always understands. We have always been such pals." Those

were some of the things that Noel had said to her about her brother one afternoon on the moor. "Winnie, do you think you could go down to the schoolroom door and say that Miss O'Hara is wanted in her room? Miss Derk will think Madame has sent for her. I simply must see her before I go. Oh, where is my comb? I simply can't find anything. Do go, Winnie, that's a dear." Mehitable looked beseechingly over her shoulder at the maid, who had come up to help her pack. She felt unusually daring to be sending for Una in this way, but she felt that she must see her to say good-by and for another reason.

Winnie went out, saying, good-naturedly, that she would do her best, and as soon as she was gone, Mehitable went over to her bureau and drew out a box from the top drawer. What would Una say at her leaving this way? Una, who had sworn to go to London ever since she had come to Cluthers, and had run away from it once in the night. Now it was she, Mehitable, who was going, and Una who was staying. Mehitable opened the box and looked inside, a faint smile on her lips. As she went on with her packing, she thought of Christmas in Ayr and of Robin's drawing her aside and giving her the box which contained a crystal heart. She had been saving the heart, for, knowing Una as she did, she felt that when a restless mood came, it would be invaluable. If she had not been angry herself, she would have told Una of the heart and given it to her when they had quarreled the time that Una tried to run away.

"What is it, Mehitable? Winnie was so mysterious. Whatever are you doing?" Una rushed into the room

and caught Mehitable's arm as she was in the act of folding her blue kimono.

"I'm going to London for a fortnight, Una. Young Madame has sent for me. Oh, Una, Una—Noel is going with me as far as York. Her brother has been killed." Mehitable swallowed a sob. Una caught her arm and shook it. She was as white as her blouse.

"Not the brother she cared so about? Yes, it must be because the other is too young for the war. Oh, Mehitable, you're going away! You and I have always planned to go to London together. How can you go without me?" Una did not cry, but her eyes blazed suddenly.

Mehitable jammed in her tam on top of everything else in her bag and then looked up at Una. "Yes, I'd give anything to have you go, but I'll promise to write every day, and remember, I'm not going for pleasure. I'm going to some one who has been very ill. I have Molly's address and, of course, I'll see her. Oh, Una, I think you're a perfect brick, the pluckiest O'Hara of the whole family. You're staying here and doing your bit right here and I'm so proud to have you for my friend. I just can't tell you how proud." Mehitable's voice shook with emotion. She put the box in Una's hand. "It's from Robin for you. I was to keep it until you needed something to cheer you."

Before Una could speak, a voice sounded from the doorway and Noel came in. She was dressed for traveling in her gray tweed coat and skirt and her face looked white and small under the brim of her dark blue felt hat. "Una, will you help José next week with the

Belgian Relief box? You're so quick and clever and there will be such a lot to do. José is hoping that you'll be her right-hand man," Noel turned a little as she spoke and they saw that José was standing behind her.

Una ran across to Noel and caught her arm. "I— Oh, Noel—Yes, I will help José. I want you to know— Oh, it doesn't do any good for us to be sorry for you." There was a sob at the end of Una's words.

"The love of my friends is what is helping me now, Una," Noel said, quietly.

"Backbow is waiting. Come at once." It was Madame's voice from the hall. There was little time for good-bys of any kind. Una, José and Madame watched them drive away.

The sky was rimmed with gold. Backbow kept to the middle of the moor road, which was, in reality, only a path. The cart creaked harshly and the uneven ground over which they drove made the journey a jouncing one. Mehitable was silent. She did not know what words to use in speaking to Noel. Anything that came to her to say seemed trite and meaningless. She was relieved when Noel herself began to talk, speaking in her usual quiet, practical way. "I'm so glad that José and Una are more congenial than they were. I feel that José has had some great sorrow, and that we must all do what we can to interest her at Cluthers. I've felt that for a long time, but I am shy with new people, and they do not turn to me as they do to you."

Mehitable was silent for a moment in sheer amazement. Noel could speak in this quiet way! "She

does not realize it yet," thought Mehitable. She put her hand on Noel's and they sat without saying more than a word or two for all the rest of the long ride across the moor. They saw the tarn gleaming faintly in the distance. The honks of wild geese broke the stillness of the evening, sweet breaths of heather-scented air blew in their faces.

When they reached the little station where they were to wait for their train, Mehitable went up to Backbow, who was standing by the cart, and spoke to him in a low voice, "Backbow, I'm going to London and I want to get in touch with Langfrai. Please give me your brother's address on the Tottenham Court Road. I will be grateful to you all my life if you'll just give it to me, now." Mehitable spoke so earnestly that Backbow looked at her in surprise. He considered for a moment.

"I don't see why tha should not have it, if tha so wishes. Langfrai is an odd lad, and ways go hard with him in London. That's why tha has not had word from him. He's living with my brother's family above his furniture shop and it's at 130 Tottenham Court Road. Here's tha train. Good-by, miss." Backbow put the two girls on the train, carefully depositing their luggage in a corner of the compartment. Then he watched the train as it puffed away through the sunset-tinted countryside. "Th' American lass is an odd one, too. She's dreaming, like the lad," he thought.

Noel took her knitting out of her bag and sat quietly in a corner of the compartment, unraveling one side of a helmet which Tip had started and abandoned. There

were several people in the carriage and she and Mehitable were not able to sit together. "It's just as well," thought Mehitable. "Noel doesn't want to talk and neither do I." She thought rapidly, however. Many things flashed through her mind as they went on through the sweet night. She had left a hasty good-by note to Nancy and had seen José for just that moment of good-by. She thought of the two girls, Noel and José, as they had stood that moment in the doorway of her room, side by side, two girls whom the war had so cruelly hurt. José had clung to her at the last. "I'll not forget Margot for a moment in London. Remember, Robin is in France. He will not forget Margot, either," she had whispered to José as she said good-by.

The two girls were able to sit next each other after a while. It grew dark suddenly and the light in the compartment was too dim for Noel to go on with her knitting. She put it away in her bag and sat with her hands folded, looking out at the far stretch of desolate countryside. "I'm so happy for you, Mehitable. I know what it must mean to you to be going up to London to see your great friend. I should like to know her, too. Do you remember the afternoon on the moor when you told me about her and how lonely and miserable you were the time when you first saw her?" Noel put her arm in Mehitable's.

Mehitable nodded, for the moment unable to answer. It was the afternoon that Noel had told her about her beloved elder brother, and he had been killed in the war. Through the deepening dusk they saw the spires of York and a few moments later the train slowed up

and stopped in the midst of the bustle of a big, busy station. A young boy who looked like Noel greeted her as they stepped off the train. It was Keith, her younger brother. She seemed to cling to him for a moment. Then she introduced him to Mehitable. There was a little time before the departure of the London train and they walked out of the station and down the street opposite. At any other time Mehitable would have thrilled at the thought of walking along the streets of York, the famous old city of wars and guarded gates, shadowed always by the dark, mysterious towering of its great cathedral. But as she caught sight of it now, looming against the sky, she shrank from it. She felt ill at ease and unhappy at being with Noel and her brother in their first meeting in the midst of their sorrow.

They had only time to walk past the cathedral and back to the station, and they spoke very little. Keith was evidently shy of strangers and dazed by the sudden dreadful news. He answered Noel's few questions briefly and she did not attempt to bring him into her conversation with Mehitable. They saw her safely on the train as Madame had wished them to do, and Keith gave her *The London Times* to read. Noel clung to her for a moment just before the train started. "It would have been a happier journey for you to have taken alone, Mehitable, but it's meant so much to me to have you," she whispered.

"Oh, Noel. If there was only something I could do," Mehitable whispered back. As the train pulled out and she saw Noel's face under the wide hat brim, she knew that her friend had realized her grief at last.

Mehitable always thought of that journey as the most dreary of her life and she was sure that she would never want to go to York again or see the cathedral. It was not until Philippe's familiar voice greeted her, late that night, with "Hello, Mehitable, you look as though you'd seen your great grandmother's ghost," that she cheered up at all. Something in the silent reserve of Noel and her brother in their grief had touched her very deeply.

Excitement came as soon as she saw Philippe. He had come alone with his car to meet her at one o'clock in the morning and that in itself was amusing and interesting. They both laughed at the thought of his grandmother's horror if she could know of it, for she had wired that a nurse from the Convalescent Home should meet Mehitable.

"Grandmother will never realize that I'm not the same little boy with the tutor and the pony that she's always bossed around, although I'll be seventeen before you know it. Isn't it jolly having you down here, Mehitable! You can peek in at mother to-night, if you want to. I know she won't be asleep. She'll be far too excited at the thought of seeing you. Yes, that's Westminster Bridge, but don't ask me questions about London now. We've oceans of time for all that sort of thing. Yes, that's Big Ben, but I won't answer another question. I want to ask some."

Mehitable was so tired that she was contented to sit back and gaze at London. "Isn't it just like grandmother to have brought you all through London on your way to that God-forsaken Cluthers, and not let you have any fun here or see anything." They had

reached the door of the Convalescent Home, where Mehitable was to stay with Young Madame, and Philippe jumped down and helped her out of the car, following her up the steps with her bag.

It was like a dream. The still house, her room with a fire in the fireplace at one end, a bowl of roses on the table by the bed. The half-open door and a voice weak but familiar calling softly, "Mehitable." Then Young Madame, in a rose dressing gown, with her arms held out to welcome her. Mehitable flew straight into these arms, and as once before, in the hollow of a tree in the Château garden in Paris, she was comforted.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE

DESIRE peppered some oyster soup, placed the bowl which contained it on a tray with a plate of soda crackers, a spoon, and an embroidered napkin. She spoke over her shoulder to Barbara, who had just come in the back door, a swirl of cold air blowing in with her.

"That you, Barbara? I've made some oyster soup for Miss Webster. She said she guessed she could relish some, and land knows, if there's anything that's tasty to her, I'm glad to make it. If t'was green cheese and she wanted some, I'd try to get the man in the moon to give me the recipe." Desire smiled as she heard Barbara's burst of laughter.

"Desire, you're such fun. How's Aunt Comfort?" As she spoke, Barbara came up to Desire and took the tray from her. "Let me carry it up. I brought over the letter I had yesterday from Mehitable. I know she had one, too, but this may have bits in it that are new."

"Yes, do take up the tray. You do her more good than I do. I declare, I think missin' Mehitable is more than half what's the matter with her. You've been a real comfort to her, lately, Barbara. I guess you'll have to do the best you can to take Mehitable's place." Desire pushed her spectacles up on her fore-

head as she spoke. "Sometimes it seems to me that that precious child has gone over there for good. Ain't that an awful thought!" Desire turned away hastily, and as Barbara started toward the stairway with the tray, she wiped a tear that was trickling down her nose. Then she followed Barbara toward the stairs. "Mehitable wrote real good news about her literature work. She got the highest mark there is, for an essay, but an awful low one in geometry," she announced, speaking more cheerfully, as though ashamed of her momentary lapse into gloom.

Barbara smiled over the tray as she mounted the steep backstairs. Mehitable's letters to her did not dwell on geometry or school prizes. "Her letters to me are like the way she used to talk on the hill at sunset time," she thought as she reached the top step. What would Aunt Comfort say if she should read them. They contained so much that was Mehitable, fancies about the moor and tarn, much about a tawny-haired boy who lived in a cave, scraps of verse, thoughts. These letters of Mehitable's were the golden touches to Barbara's life.

She knocked softly at Miss Webster's door and went inside, bearing the tray carefully. "Good morning, Aunt Comfort. Here's oyster soup and Barbara both at once," she announced, coming up to the side of the bed where Miss Webster sat propped up with pillows. She had a gray shawl about her shoulders and in the cold March light her face looked drawn and white. As Barbara came up to the bed, she eyed the soup critically.

"It's sure to be too salty. Desire's careless with salt," she remarked.

Barbara adjusted the tray and shook out the napkin. "The soup looks pretty good to me, Aunt Comfort," she said, cheerfully. Miss Webster tasted it and announced that it was just about right, after all. She had had a severe cold a few weeks before, and although it had nearly gone, she had not seemed to regain her usual briskness and vigor, and after an attack of dizziness, had consented to stay in bed for a few days.

"I guess I'm lazy, Barbara. There's nothing in creation the matter with me. It's more than half Desire's fault for keeping me here in bed."

Barbara could not help smiling at the thought of any one keeping Miss Webster any place in which she did not wish to stay. Like *Mehitable*, she was the last word in authority to Barbara. She sat down beside the bed and drew *Mehitable's* letter from her pocket. "I know you had a letter yesterday, so you know all the news, but I just thought I'd bring mine over anyway. Oh, Aunt Comfort, it's spring on the moor." As she spoke, Barbara opened the letter and glanced down a page. Then she began to read. "It's spring on the moor, real spring now. The heather buds are rosy and the gorse bushes are tipped with gold and everything is waking up. It is more mysterious than ever before. Some time I will tell you more about the tarn. I mean my thoughts about it. Do you remember how you used to ask me to think up something creepy and different when I made up fairy tales? Oh, Barbie, the tarn is stranger than anything I could ever have known or imagined." Barbara looked up sud-

denly and saw that Miss Webster was gazing off, out of the window, and there was a look on her face that she had never seen before, a mingled sadness and wistfulness. It was gone in an instant, and she spoke sharply.

"I wonder when *Mehitable* is going to wake up, speaking of everything else waking. She talks the same foolishness she used to."

Eager protesting words rose to Barbara's lips, but she did not utter them, remembering the look she had seen on Miss Webster's face and *Desire's* remark in the kitchen, "*Missin' Mehitable* is m^{ore} than half what's the matter with her." Barbara smiled over the letter at the stern, white face against the pillows. "Now, Aunt Comfort," she said, "you know you're as proud as punch of her. Why, she told you in her letter yesterday that she had won the first prize for an essay."

Miss Webster took her last spoonful of soup, slowly. "Well, she gets zero in geometry. She wrote and told me she was about ready to give it up, and in my next letter to her, I'm going to tell her the Websters don't give up as easy as all that and that I don't want a niece who can't add or subtract!" There was a twinkle in Miss Webster's eyes as she spoke. Already Barbara's visit was benefiting her.

Barbara read hastily through a page of the letter covered with *Mehitable's* scrawly writing. It was all about *Langfrai* and although Barbara herself was consumed with curiosity regarding him, she knew that Miss Webster had never heard of him and that she would not in the least approve of her niece's knowing a boy who lived in a cave on the moor. *Mehitable* wrote

that he had left the moor and gone to London. Barbara mused a minute. *Mehitable* wrote a great deal of the boy with the strange name.

"Isn't it strange to think of *Mehitable* way up there in the north of England, instead of in Paris, Aunt Comfort. I was sorry when I first heard of it, but now she loves it more than Paris. It's the moor!" Barbara took up the tray and went with it across the room. When she reached the door she looked back and smiled. "Only one year more and we'll have her back," she said.

"Maybe and maybe not. That friend of hers, the daughter-in-law of Madame Cateau, wants her to stay with them in England. *Mehitable* didn't say so. Madame—the younger one—wrote me herself. I've had several letters from her about *Mehitable*. Well, I want she should stay just as long as she's benefited by it. I'll never be the one to stand in her way. I want her to have the best, but what I want the most is for her to learn sense. If she'd had her way, she'd be doing some sort of war work in France, but I put my foot down on that, good and proper. Have you heard from Robin?" Miss Webster's question came so abruptly that Barbara nearly dropped the tray.

"No, Aunt Comfort, not since the note written just after he reached Paris. Lucy hasn't heard either and I don't think Mrs. Ward has had more than a line or so, and not at all for three weeks. She thinks he's in Paris, but Lucy and I are almost sure he's been sent out. I mean to the front." Barbara spoke anxiously though she tried not to let Miss Webster see how anxious she really was.

"Nonsense, don't you start in making trouble out of nothing, Barbara. Robin Ward's enjoying himself to the top of his bent, somewhere. You mark my words, he's having a good time out of all this and he will come back more sure of himself than ever. He's trailing around in Miss Meadows' or somebody's automobile and there's fun on tap or my name's not Comfort Webster. There, I musn't talk another word. Come over a minute after supper, if you're not too busy." Miss Webster lay back and closed her eyes, as she finished speaking.

"I've oceans of time now that Black Mandy has come to stay, so I'll surely run over, Aunt Comfort." Barbara closed the door softly and went on down to the kitchen where Desire was putting some bread to set, on a chair close to the stove.

"Remember, you're not to say a word about Miss Webster's being poorly to Mehitable, Barbara. I don't know what she'd do to the two of us if we did say anything about it in our letters. I guess she'll perk up when spring really comes." Desire covered the bread with a white towel. She looked anxious. "Sometimes I wonder if three years ain't too long for Mehitable to be away. Bless the dear lamb, it would just about break her heart to give up any of the precious time over there at school. I'd be the last one to take a week of it away from her."

"I haven't said a word about Aunt Comfort's being ill! Of course I won't! Aunt Comfort's stern, but she's awfully unselfish." Barbara opened the back door, ran down the steps of the Webster house, and

crossed the strip of snow-covered grounds which separated it from her own home.

A broad, black face beamed at her from the kitchen door. "I'se baked up a couple o' pies, honey. You kin ask some o' them wild young 'uns in for supper if you wants to. I'se gwine to rest my poor back for awhile." Black Mandy said this last over her shoulder, as she began to ascend the back stairs. Barbara made a face at her behind her back, and then went on through to the front of the house. She was bored at having Black Mandy staying in the house. She had had several years of independence, for she had developed a love of cooking at an early age and had ordered about the meek country girl who had come as servant after her mother's death when she was thirteen. She had finally persuaded her father to dismiss the girl, and had reigned alone. Her father, however, had accepted a position as master in a boys' school near Boston the autumn before, and had insisted on Black Mandy's coming to stay.

Ever since she could remember, Barbara had known Black Mandy who had come to wash and clean and "help round." She was fond of her as a familiar part of the old days, but it exasperated her to have some one issuing orders and giving out mandates as to what should be done. It was all very well to ignore Black Mandy but she was not a particularly easy person to ignore, being so ponderous and talkative and liable to "misery" in her back at the wrong time. She was not fond of "comp'ny folks" as she called the young people who came constantly to the house. When most thoroughly disapproving of them, she called them

"young 'uns" and her grumblings were loudest when all the crowd were present and ragtime resounded from the living room, mingled with high voices and much laughter.

Barbara's house had always been the most popular since the days of hide and seek, for there was no one really in authority, and Barbara's cakes were famous. They always had the best times at Barbara's where there was no Aunt Comfort or Mrs. Bently or any grown-up to "butt in."

Barbara ran up the stairs and across the hall to her room. Since her new yellow curtains had been put up at the windows and her bed and bureau painted gray, she never came into her room without wondering what *Mehitable* would think of it. There were two yellow and gray rag rugs on the floor and a table covered with a yellow cloth stood by the window. "It needs a bowl of daffodils," she thought as she went over to the bureau. She sat down in front of her mirror and put on a tan straw hat which had lain on the stool in front of it. She turned her head to see the effect of the golden curve of her hair under the brim, at the back. Then she ran downstairs, put on her heavy, tan winter coat, and went out into the sharp air. She looked up and down the street. No one of her friends was in sight. She hesitated for a moment, undecided whether to go over and see if Ruby could go down to the post office with her. Then she went on alone. She rather wanted to be alone.

As she went by the Ward's brown house with its wide verandas and surroundings of snow-covered pine trees, she saw that Amy Ward was waving to her from the

library window, and she ran up the path. Amy opened the front door and greeted her with "Come in a minute," and she followed her inside. They went into the library and sat down by a wood fire. "I'm ever so glad you came along, Barb. I've had the blues all the afternoon and am as restless as a cat," Amy announced, sitting back in a big leather chair and looking like a rose with her red cheeks and her rose silk sweater.

"I hate everything to-day, too. Amy, don't you think it's queer that we don't hear from Robin? What do they all think here?"

Amy was silent a moment, knocking one slippered foot against another. "Well," she said finally, "I don't know what to say. You see, they're not really as worried as you and I are, because they don't know as much as we do. You see, honey, Aunt Cordelia doesn't know that Robin's a motor messenger. He told me that's what he hoped to do, before he went away, and he told you the same, when you were in New York together, but the others don't know it. Robin knows his family so well, his mother, especially. He knows how she's always worried and he just made up his mind not to tell her. They had the letter from Paris, and they think he went over to Paris with Miss Meadows, just to see the city. They think he doesn't write because he's busy. Perhaps that is the reason—but I'm worried, Barb, I didn't sleep at all last night."

Barbara nodded. "I'm worried, too," she said simply.

Amy held out a box of Mailliard chocolates. "Have some and cheer up. That is what we all do over here, seems to me. We just eat candy and think everything's

going to be all right. Do you know, Barb, I think you and I are more awake to things than the rest of the people in this slow, self-satisfied town. Perhaps it's because of Robin." Amy bit into a pistachio filled chocolate as she spoke.

"I don't think it's right for Mrs. Ward not to know about Robin. I'm sure his father thinks that he must be on active duty, and that's why he's looking so badly." The war seemed suddenly very close to them.

Amy began to talk of the school which she had attended near New York for several years, and as Mrs. Ward came into the room while she was chatting, nothing more was said about danger to Robin. A little later Barbara left them, going on down the snowy street, her thoughts far away with Mehitable and Robin. She thought of Una, too, and of all that Mehitable had written her about the visit to Ayr. How wonderful it had been that Robin had been with them there. A lump came to Barbara's throat and a sudden restless bitterness touched her heart. Everyone had something that was different except herself. Amy had her good times at school and was going back again for the next term. Mehitable—Oh, but she was glad with all her heart for every joy that came to Mehitable. What was Una like? Robin had called her "fascinating and lovely," Mehitable had written that. Odd words for Robin Ward to use about any one.

Barbara looked up from her musing and found herself directly opposite the gray schoolhouse where for many years she and Mehitable had sat side by side. They had gone in together and looked around it, just before Mehitable had sailed for France. A sudden

impulse made her turn in at the gate. It was Saturday and there would be no one about. The door was unlocked, preparatory to the janitor's tending the furnace, after cleaning up. Barbara opened it and went inside.

It looked just as it had looked that afternoon when she and Mehitable had come in. How long it was since they had been there as pupils, had graduated, and left for the high school in the square beyond.

Barbara sat down at her old desk, buried her face in her arms, and burst into tears. It was quiet and lonely and full of memories, that old schoolroom. "It's like my life, just nothing but grayness and stupid days and weeks and years. I love beautiful things and the thrill of life like the week in New York with Robin and Miss Meadows, but there isn't anything thrilling about me, and there never, never will be." Barbara half sobbed her thoughts aloud as she let a wave of self-pity sweep over her.

The door creaked and some one came inside. She turned her head, her handkerchief at her eyes and saw that Johnny Gray was gazing at her in astonishment. "I thought you were the janitor, Johnny," she said weakly, rubbing her eyes. "Don't ask me what's the matter, Johnny, for I can't tell you. I just felt like crying, that's all. I suddenly hated everything and everybody in this town and wished it could be swallowed up by an earthquake. Dear me, what a sight I must be." She opened her hand bag and took out a little mirror and a vanity case, and as the bewildered Johnny sat down in the desk in front of her, she powdered her nose and arranged her hat.

"Funny, my coming along just then. I'd been to the post office and was bringing you up a letter. I saw you turn in here and just followed along. I wondered what the charm might be. Of all forlorn places!" Barbara interrupted Johnny, speaking quickly:

"My letter, Johnny. Oh, I hope and pray that it's something interesting. If it isn't, don't give it to me." Barbara held out her hand and Johnny fished in his pocket. "It's from Robin," he said, and he waited while Barbara tore open the envelope and read.

"Dear Barbara,

"I sent letters to you and Mehitable and mother by a supply motor driver, but he came to grief on the way to the outpost, where he expected to meet up with a mail motor. I guess none of you have heard from me in some time. It's like spring to-day. There's mud enough to wade in. Had letters from Mehitable and her friend, Miss O'Hara. Cluthers must be a queer place. Thanks a lot for the box of marshmallows. They came through all right, dry, but fine when toasted over a fire. You bet I'm sorry, too, that cookies won't keep. Hope you'll have a chance to wear the gold opera cloak in our dear old Cherryville. How are all the old dears, Miss Webster, Desire, Miss Prince, Silas, and all the rest? I know this is a stupid letter. I'm too sleepy to write more. Yours for aye, Robin."

Barbara read the letter out loud and then looked across at Johnny. "He's right. It is a stupid letter. I never would have thought it of Robin. He's such

fun, always. It just didn't tell us anything at all. It's as though he didn't want to say the things that really were interesting and yet, felt he ought to write." She gazed perplexedly down at the letter.

Johnny spoke slowly. "I guess you're right, Barbara. Robin's seen and done so much since he last saw us that he feels out of touch. Cherryville seems a long ways off, sort of unreal. He's taken up with something so big that he can't see beyond it, for the moment." Johnny looked off wistfully out of the window.

"You do put things awfully well, Johnny." Barbara felt a very warm affection toward her old friend. Johnny was so everyday and usual that he was like a part of the very streets and houses of Cherryville. He never did anything that was interesting at all. He was in school all day and in the evening he helped in the post office, yet it was he, not Robin who had dreamed and vaguely planned a future away from Cherryville, far away. He seemed suddenly to bring Mehitable close. How often had the three of them talked over what they would like life to bring them. Barbara jumped up suddenly. "Come along home to supper with me, Johnny. We'll have it early so you'll have plenty of time before you need to be back at the post office. I'd rather talk to you than any one, to-night."

"I'd love to," Johnny answered, and the two went out of the schoolroom of many memories, into the sharp twilight.

"You always used to say that, Johnny, when we got up a sudden picnic. I can just see you now, all of us in fact; Mehitable asking Desire for half a chocolate

cake and Desire putting Aunt Comfort off the scent!" Barbara laughed. She felt cheered, not happy, but excited. Whether Robin's letter had been satisfactory or not, it was a letter, and it was interesting having a great friend actually in the midst of a war, that to the Cherryville inhabitants seemed as unreal as the battles of the gods.

"Do you remember when Robin dressed up as a ghost and scared old Merrywether? Mehitable's letter telling about their going to Greyfrairs' Churchyard made me think of it." Barbara ran up the steps. "You can read by the living-room table while I send Black Mandy over to Darky Town to see her niece Louisa, who has hurt her foot. Then you can help with supper, if you like," she said, divesting herself of her coat and hat in the hall.

Black Mandy was only too glad to go and see her niece and take her the freshly baked pie. She was homesick for her "own folks" in the other part of town, and was always glad of an excuse to go and see them.

"Ruby's coming to spend the night, so you might just as well stay over until morning," suggested Barbara to Black Mandy who heartily agreed with her. She started off with a basket well filled with delicacies and her parting words were heartfelt. "You all is good enough round up here, honey, but I'se kind o' hankerin' fo' some good old genuine colored folks."

Johnny and Barbara had supper on a small table by the living-room fire. They were both in a reminiscent mood, and talked and laughed over old times. Johnny was dismayed at having found Barbara crying and exerted himself to cheer her. Barbara baked a

pan of biscuits, fried some ham and creamed some potatoes, and cut a fresh cocoanut cake which Mandy had made that morning. It was an appetizing meal.

"Doesn't it all seem weird to you, Johnny? I mean, contrasting our lives with Mehitable's? Do you think she can ever be happy, just to settle down here in Cherryville?" Barbara asked, as they sat in the firelight, enjoying their supper.

"I don't think she ever will settle down here, Barbara. Tell me," Johnny leaned forward eagerly as he spoke, "has she written you about—the boy on the moor?"

Barbara nodded, helping herself to a piece of cake. "It's the most interesting thing that's happened yet. A boy living in a cave on a moor—that's just what Mehitable would adore. He's gone to London now to stay with the gardener's brother."

The front door slammed and Ruby ran in, her cheeks glowing and her eyes snapping. "Hullo! It's glorious out now. I wish you had time to take us for a sleigh ride, Johnny. Ras wants us to go out in the car as far as Mrs. Stebbins, and have coffee, but the drifts are awful. It's foolish to go, I think. What do you say, Barb?" Ruby sank into a chair by the table.

"Oh, let's just stay here. Phone Ras to come over and Lucy, too, if you like. You'd better stop in on your way from the post office, Johnny. We'll try the new tango record," Barbara said happily. She passed the cake to Ruby, who said, after her first bite, "Um! Robin Ward would like a piece this very minute, or I'm mistaken. He may be having a perfectly glorious time but he isn't having Cherryville cocoanut cake."

CHAPTER XIX

IN BELGIUM

"WE need mud to stop the cracks, Margot. Let us go outside. It's too cold for you to lie there on the cot. Come!"

"It will be colder outside, Germaine."

"No, we can run a little way. It always warms us. Come!"

A sudden trembling and a muffled roar which seemed to come from under the very floor of their shelter abruptly stopped the conversation. It made Margot Blanc jump off of the cot and catch hold of her companion's arm. Germaine was two years Margot's senior. Her dark face showed none of the fear which held her.

"That is nearer. Listen, Germaine. It is coming closer and closer." A sob choked Margot's last words as she clung to her friend.

"It's far, very far. You know yourself how different this little shock is from what we've known. Think of Antwerp. No! I didn't mean that. Don't think of it. There, how stupid I am. I've said the worst possible thing. Stop crying, Margot. You'll never find José if you cry. We must be brave, like soldiers." Germaine straightened her shoulders and tossed back her black, unkempt, roughly braided hair.

Then she threw her arm across Margot's shoulder and drew her toward the door of the shed.

When once outside, the faces of both girls brightened simultaneously, for the spring sun, which had been illusive for days, shone bravely, and the glad warmth touched them.

"It's easier when the sun shines," remarked Germaine cheerfully, her arm closely linked in that of her companion.

"It's harder, much harder. It makes me think of the way it used to shine in uncle's garden. I can shut my eyes and see José running between the poplar rows."

"Nevertheless the sun is good. We must welcome it. Let us walk," Germaine smiled encouragingly.

"The ground is so rough, I shall fall!" protested Margot.

"No, I'll hold you firmly. Breathe in this fine air. We could run if you were strong enough." Germaine put her arm close about her friend's waist. They walked slowly across the field. The sky showed faintly blue above a long, flat stretch of green countryside. Now and then as they walked they felt the odd trembling under their feet that had come suddenly there in the shed. "It's a long way off," Germaine said reassuringly each time that they felt it. "We need have no fear of its coming nearer for several days, perhaps longer. We'll rest in the shed a day or two more and then we must go on. We must go on," she repeated.

"Yes, because of José we must go on. You will help me find her. You have promised." Margot put

her head down on her arm and Germaine gave her a quick pat on the back.

"You will never find her if you do not show more courage. I tell you we must be like our soldiers. Think, Margot, of the wonderful things that have happened to us." Germaine stood still for a minute, and there was beauty in her usually plain face, as she looked off at the quiet sky.

Margot turned to her in amazement, her blue eyes wide with bewilderment. "Cruel things, you mean, cruel"—she gasped.

Germaine went on speaking, as though she had not heard her: "It was wonderful, our meeting in the crowds. You were distracted and I was so lonely."

Margot threw both arms about her friend and pressed her white face close to Germaine's dark one. "I thank the good God every day for you," she breathed.

"The canteen we found when we were starving," Germaine went on.

Margot nodded, still clinging to her friend. "The lonely road and you and I not knowing what to do. There was no place for us to go." Margot's voice deepened to a wail as she spoke.

"The tearing hunger and then—finding the canteen. Remember that!" Germaine reminded her. "Help has always come to us when most we needed it. Here we are in a cowherd's own hut with his good cow to give us milk. That is wonderful, Margot." Germaine said "wonderful" softly, a sudden tenderness on her face.

"There is no help I want, except that which will

aid me in finding José. You know that well," Margot said by way of answer.

"That, too, may come. We can only hope," said Germaine, while they walked slowly on across the rough stubble field.

Later as they stood for a moment outside the cow-herd's hut which was their refuge, a sudden flare of crimson to the west made them catch their breath. The spring-touched country all about them showed red as far as they could see.

"It's near. You said it wasn't, but it is, Germaine—see!" Margot shaded her eyes with her thin hand.

"It's far. You know we've seen the red come and go in the sky many times since we've traveled together. Remember the time we watched it all night when we stayed at the cottage of the poor woman whose four sons were killed at Mons. We were there with her four days because you were so weak, and no battle came near us." Germaine spoke reassuringly, but as she looked over the top of Margot's fair head at the deepening crimson of the sky and felt the quiver of the hard ground under her feet, there was a look of intense excitement in her eyes, such a look as might have been in the eyes of any Belgian soldier. She was a broad-shouldered girl, tall for her age, and although only two years older than Margot, she felt almost like a mother to her. She had learned a sort of tact and gentleness in dealing with the younger girl which had come to her instinctively and had never been fostered on the big farm near Antwerp among a large family of hard-working cousins with whom she had always lived.

Margot laughed as they went inside. It was the first time Germaine had ever heard her laugh, and it warmed her heart.

"We are so funny, you and I, Germaine. We talk so seriously about filling up the cracks with mud!" Margot sighed the next minute, shivering as Germaine bent over to examine the rickety stove in a corner of the one room which was all the cowherd's hut could boast. There was a cot in another corner of the room and that, with the addition of a table and stool, constituted the furnishing of the room. They picked fagots in the field for fuel for the stove, whose rusty, twisted pipe projected through the roof of the hut, but the draft was so poor that they had had little or no comfort from their almost futile attempts at making fires.

They had come upon the hut early one morning after a long night of wandering. It was deserted and they took possession of it, thankful beyond words to have found a shelter. It was a wretched domicile, having but one small window, the glass of which had mostly fallen away, but they found a barrel half full of flour, a rusty frying pan, and a few poor utensils. They found something else, too, and it was this something else which made Germaine, especially, feel that wonderful things had happened to them. A mournful "moo" had greeted them soon after they had come into the hut and in the cowshed beyond they had found a white cow with brown spots. They had named her Susan because she looked like a cow on Germaine's cousins' farm. Germaine had puzzled over the reason why the cow had been left behind, and had con-

cluded that the cowherd had started away in great haste. There was a good supply of fodder in the shed and the animal seemed in fairly good condition.

"Let us go and say good night to Susan, and then cuddle up on the cot together. It is so much worse when the sunshine goes," said Margot, clinging to Germaine's arm.

The two girls went on out to the shed and were greeted reproachfully by Susan's mournful "moo." "It's just as though she blamed us for the owner of the hut's going off and leaving her. I suppose he was a cowherd, for there is that long row of cowsheds back of the barn. He was called to arms, no doubt. I wonder what he did with the other cows. It was good that he left his milk pail. Think of it, Margot. We've had milk every day." Germaine patted Susan's nose as she spoke.

The two girls lay awake for a long time, talking. They had each drunk of Susan's milk from a cracked tin cup. "It is good indeed that you are brave and can milk a cow, Germaine," Margot said cheerfully as they drew their coats up around them and shivered in the damp air. She seemed more cheerful than at any time since Germaine had known her, and the older girl felt that it was the right time in which to question her some more. "You are clever, Germaine. There are so many things that you can do," Margot went on, snuggling close to her friend.

"As clever as José?" asked Germaine boldly. It was not a wise thing, as a rule, to mention Margot's sister's name to her.

"José—ah, she was different, clever in other ways,

fencing, riding, books. José knows much of books." Margot's voice trailed into a sob.

"Do not cry. It is well that you speak of her. All you say gives me the assurance that she is safe. A girl so clever should be able to look out for herself. Tell me again, Margot, just where it was that you think you last saw her. I know the crowds were so great and that you were confused, but try and tell me all you can." Germaine put an arm protectingly about Margot.

"I have told you all. It was twilight and we had word from my uncle to leave Antwerp. The guns were pounding. There was madness everywhere. I fell down and when I stood up, there was no José. Then I wandered for three days, and then I found you in the barn with others who were escaping. I thank God for you every day, my Germaine," Margot answered. After a few minutes she went on speaking, catching her breath with sobs. "There was a green market cart drawn by three black dogs. I fell against it and then some one stepped on me. That was the last time I saw José."

Germaine lay awake after Margot had fallen asleep, thinking quickly. There was still a faint boom of guns in the distance and now and then the ground shook under the cot. "We must not stay. In the morning we must travel on," she thought as she, too, fell asleep.

Germaine woke suddenly and sat up. Then she crept out of the cot and opened the door. It was not the roaring of the evening before which had awakened her, it was the crisp sound of sharpshooting. "We've

never gone away from the hut. We've never dared to. Now there is fighting all about us. Artillery from the west 'way off. That was the pounding last night. It's not a battle, I believe, but it's close, whatever it is and I'm sure it's sniping. We're in the range. We must get away." She thought rapidly, starting to put on her coat. A few minutes later she had roused Margot and given her a cup of Susan's milk left over from the night before. A half hour later they were well on their way across the fields.

Three miles behind them Robin Ward and his friend, Simms Lawrence, were having a last meal together before going their different ways. They had met several months before and their friendship had been sudden and, in spite of weeks when they did not see or hear of each other, had thrived vigorously. They were eating tinned beans and jam and they sat on the running board of Robin's car. For the first time in months Robin felt as though he were not living in a maze and that life still held its normal moments. His work was entirely with the British Service Corps and he was liable to be called at any time, day or night. He had not seen a bed for a fortnight. He had been thinking of Una and *Mehitable* all day. The thrill of adventure had returned to him. It had been blotted out by homesickness and drudgery, but as he sat with Simms eating his beans, with real danger ahead of him for the first time, he could have sung with joy. It was good to be there resting for the moment, with no one knew what kind of an adventure ahead of one.

It was good having the English boy, Simms, for a friend.

"Gad, this mud is vile," commented Simms. "It's rotten for the horses. I don't see how they stand it. We need guns, Yank. We need 'em badly." Simms drank some coffee with a gulp.

"What we need is men," Robin answered, and he felt a warm glow at his heart as he said the word "we." "We need men and guns and horses. I came across some field artillery yesterday and worked with them for an hour. The horses were sunk in the mud up to their haunches. Some of the boys were building a temporary shelter. It was fierce." He put his empty plate down on the ground and then wiped his hands with his handkerchief.

Simms settled comfortably back against the car, his arms clasped behind his head, his plate balanced precariously on his knee. All about them was the confusion and noise of the camp, the thunder of army trucks and motor lorries, shouting and laughing, the innumerable sounds of life, more welcome to both of them than they had guessed could be possible. Robin had gone back and forth from Paris to the outposts of the nearest divisions, the first weeks of his service, learning the way of things, growing accustomed to the monotony and fatigue and discipline. Then he had been sent on to other headquarters, and the days and nights had become more or less alike. He seemed always alone, always in his car, always on his way to a destination which could only be a resting place for the moment. He had been so tired many times, at first, that he could not think. It was true that he had

written almost no letters. As he sat there on the running board of his car, talking to his friend, he wanted, for the first time, to write to Una and Mehitable. He began to feel more like his cheery self.

"What do you suppose will happen? I mean, it's not over yet. It's hardly begun, and no one knows when it will end. America will have to come in." Simms yawned as he spoke, looking up at the first faint glimmer of stars, overhead.

Robin nodded. "Yes, but America doesn't know it, yet. Think of all the thousands who don't know what it's like." He drew a long breath, stretching his legs out in front of him. There was a pale flare of light on the sky-line, but the light had waned, and he saw Simms' face only dimly. Scarlet firelight from the field kitchen in the vast stretch of ground beyond them made daring spurts of color through the deepening night.

Simms nodded toward the far glimmer of light against the sky.

"General headquarters isn't more than a couple of dozen miles farther on, I'd say. I'm going to divisional headquarters to-morrow," he remarked.

Robin exclaimed, "Wish you were going my way!" He was the most sociable of souls, and he had suffered from loneliness during the past months. "I was stuck in the mud about twenty miles east last week and some *chasseurs à pied*"—Robin pronounced this last carefully, proud of his French—"helped me out of it. No wonder the car looks like a Tin Lizzy in a fit. Say, Simms, what do you think of all this, anyway?" Robin hesitated. "I mean, if it keeps on, and it will, of

course"—Robin stopped speaking again, color coming to his brown cheeks—"I guess things will never be the same again. We'll all be different," he said.

The English boy did not answer for a moment and as he looked at the flare of light on the horizon, there was something in his gaze that made him seem, not so much the mud-covered, tired-out motor messenger, as—what was it? Robin realized suddenly. It was the picture that Barbara had on the mantel over the fireplace in her sitting room, Sir Galahad.

"No, things can never be the same again. We can never be the same. That's the thing that keeps me going, the thought that when it's over, it will mean a different place, this world, I mean, for all of us. No one will be able to forget the boys who have died and those who have done their best. People will want—oh, different things. It will be a top-hole world when the war's over." Robin nodded, drawing on his gloves. Simms jumped up and exclaimed, "Gad, what a road! Damn the mud! You'll never get through with that car. I see you crawling, yet." Simms delivered this cheerful prophecy from his motorcycle. Their roads parted at the crossway, and they had seen by their maps that they were at the end of their journey together. Simms was going straight to headquarters, but Robin had been given a message for the colonel of a British contingent in an outer trench. It was the most important work that had been entrusted to him, and he knew that it was the first real danger that had come his way. There had been no time, since he had sailed away from his country across

the sea, that death had not encircled him. He thought of this vaguely, not actually realizing it.

He stuffed the greasy rag into his pocket which had been used to clean the car. Then he flashed his electric light on to his map, scanned it again for an instant, and put it in his pocket. "Gosh, I wish you were coming on my way, Simms," he said.

"Yes, you're in for it. Sorry we can't leg it through the mud together, old top, for that's what you'll be doing in just about a half hour," answered Simms, biting into a piece of milk chocolate, which he almost swallowed whole.

"Thank you for nothing," Robin said with a grin.

"Well, here's good-by. We're regular pals, eh, what? See you in town. By the way, town means London, Yank. Let's spend our leaves together. You can always get word to me at headquarters. Here's to it!" Simms held out a leather-gauntletted hand and Robin, coming up to the side of the motorcycle, grasped and shook it.

"Here's to it, I say, too, Simms. Gosh, I'll miss your company," he said warmly.

"We'll meet up in the summer. You must come and stay with my people. Good-by, Yank." Simms was off with the last words, his motorcycle making a harsh spurt. The wind caught his voice and his words turned into a whisper.

"It's no use, Germaine. I can't go on. I'm not strong like you," Margot sobbed.

"You must go on whether you think you can or not. You say you come from a family of soldiers. Well,

come on, I tell you, and come quickly." Germaine shook Margot as she spoke and although there was pity in her eyes, there was none in her voice.

Margot sank to the ground, still sobbing, and for a moment as Germaine looked down at her, despair touched her dark face. "Listen, Margot, you do not want to die, not until you have seen José again. I do not need to tell you of our danger. It has been with us since we left the cowherd's hut and it is with us now. I hope that we will come to a British outpost. You know we saw some of their motor lorries in the distance. We will be under fire if we do not go on." Germaine lifted Margot to her feet and together they pressed on, Margot always clinging to her friend. The ground shook under them, but it was not this sign of warfare that frightened Germaine. It was the fear that at any time they might find themselves near a German outpost. She could face a thing boldly in the light, but all her life she had hated the dark. She was slow thinking, but she was shrewd, and she had felt all day that something was closing in on them. It was in the air. Yesterday they had awakened to rocking walls and the thunder of cannon. They had put a lump of cheese, a loaf of the rough bread Germaine had made, and a bottle of milk into a bag, and with a quick good-by to Susan, the cow, had hurried on across the fields.

"That is better. You see you can do things when you try. Now I think we shall not walk so fast. I do not know quite what to do," Germaine whispered. They slackened their steps and now and then stopped, listening, the damp wind blowing about them.

Faint shafts of light flashed against the black sky. The girls walked with their arms close about each other, slipping now and then in the mud. Margot fell once and hurt her arm. Her breath came in short, faint sobs. She had torn the sleeve of her jacket and it flapped in the chill wind. They had eaten all the cheese and drunk the milk, but there was a quarter of the loaf left. Germaine was saving it for the next day. They were hungry, but for the time being their situation put the thought of hunger beyond them.

Germaine waited for every flash of light in order to scan the ground beyond. Suddenly her heart stood still. She stopped short, holding Margot. Just ahead of them loomed something sharp and twisted, grotesque in the flicker of light against the sky. It was a barbed-wire entanglement.

Robin thought over many things as his car sprang forward. The rough ground shone when a flash of light touched the sky, but was darkly mysterious otherwise. He hummed his favorite song from the "Quaker Girl," which he had seen in New York before sailing:

"Oh, Jerry, kindly pass the sherry.
Won't you bid the footman stir the fire?
That's the sort of thing I'll say
On that happy, happy day,
When I'm Mrs. Jeremiah, Esquire!"

He had been thinking of Cherryville all day, Desire's sunshine cake with the orange filling, picnics in the woods, roasted potatoes, hot and mealy on the

end of a stick. He thought of Johnny, as he drove on through the darkness, of Saturday afternoons fishing with him, and Ras Peters, up the river, and how they used to glower at him when he would not keep still. He thought of his mother's words, so often used when he went off on any expedition: "Now, Robin, do be careful and don't catch cold." He laughed to himself. "Don't catch cold. Don't catch cold." The words seemed to sing themselves over and over in his mind. Think of any one caring whether or not they caught cold, if they were in Cherryville where they could have orange cake and fricasseed chicken and people all around them!

He pulled his muffler closer about his throat. It had been mild through the day, but the cold wind whistled sharply, and was rising to greater volume as the night deepened. "Mehitable would imagine all sorts of Cherryville things, I bet. She'd pretend that Barbara was with her and that they had some of Desire's crullers and some hot coffee," he thought as the car zigzagged through the mud. The road was narrowing and the mud, alas, was becoming deeper. "You'll be crawling yet," Simms had said, and his prophecy seemed liable to come true. The road was now nothing more than a path. He stopped the car and drew out his map. He had somehow lost the road and found himself in a wide path. He listened. There was no roar of guns, only the occasional flare of light in the sky and now and then the report of a rifle, and it was this sound that had made him bring his car to a standstill. During his three months' experience in France and Belgium he had learned to

distinguish sounds, and he knew that the sharp, quick report meant sniping, and that meant that he was nearer the trenches than he had thought. A flash of light revealed that which had confronted Germaine. It was a barbed-wire entanglement.

Robin took up a package of chocolate from the car seat, shoved it into his pocket, drew on a pair of leather gloves and jumped out of the car. The wind caught his breath for a moment and he started forward, slowly, incredulously. Two girls were crouching close to the entanglement, their arms about each other, and in the flash of light which had revealed them he saw that their faces were pressed close together and that they were staring up at him.

Two girls there in the desolation—two girls! Robin stared back at them with an amazement greater than theirs. The smaller of them had fair hair which fell about her shoulders. There was a splash of mud on her face and her coat was torn and caked with mud. Words of *Mehitable's* came back to him: "Her little fair-haired sister. Think of it, Robin. She's lost, somewhere in Belgium."

Germaine's voice sounded through the darkness which came after the flash that had revealed them. "You are an English boy. I know the uniform. For the sake of the *Bon Dieu* save us. We are soon to die without your help." Eager hands caught at his coat and the next flash of light he saw them both at his side, and there was no fear in the faces of either of them, only faith that he would help them. It was a strange feeling that he had then, different from anything he had ever known. The situation was so

fantastic that it might have been something conjured up in a nightmare. Two helpless human beings were trusting in him as a man to save them. A man—well, he was seventeen and a half. He was in the heart of the war and his big chance to help had come.

The sharp sound kept up and the flashes of light became more frequent. There was only one thing to do, and that was to manage, somehow, to take them with him to the trench which he must reach with his message. He knew that barbed wire was only one danger. There might be craters made by huge shells, and, above all, there would be snipers. He turned his light on the map, shielding it with his hands, and read the directions he had written on the margin: "Two hundred yards west of road are outer trenches before division headquarters. Barbed wire until last fifteen yards. Scouting district."

He spoke to the girls, and his voice sounded oddly in the shrill wind. He saw that they understood him, although he guessed that they did not know much English. "There's a chance for us to reach the trenches." He looked down at Margot, who clung to him, half fainting, her small face ghastly in the flash of light. "Are you Margot Blanc?" he asked, and she fell across his arm as though he had struck her.

"Yes, yes—Oh, *Dieu merci*, it is she, Margot Blanc. I said there was a God who would help us. Yes, it is Margot. She is lost." A great sob broke from Germaine's lips, but she checked it in an instant and crouched back, her hands up to her eyes. Then she looked up at Robin's amazed round face and brown eyes. "She has fainted. You see she has had no

food to-day—just—what do you say—a bit of bread. She is only a weak little thing. We must carry her.”

“I’ll carry her across my back, that’s the best way, for we’ll have to crawl later on. You keep beside me and don’t talk after we reach the end of this field. That would be about a hundred yards now. Then there’s another hundred and then—well, I guess we’ll make it.” He hesitated, then spoke close to her ear, because of the fierceness of the wind. “We’ll be in the enemy’s range for a few minutes.”

Germaine nodded, rubbing Margot’s hands and trying to rouse her. “It is better to leave her as she is. I’ll lie down and you put her on my back. I’ll crawl with her and you crawl close beside me. Gosh, you’re a game sport,” he said.

Germaine did not understand just what a “game sport” was, but she felt the admiration in Robin’s voice and she gave him an encouraging nod. “I’ll keep close to you both, and if it’s too much I can help with Margot. I’ve carried her before,” she said.

They made slow progress because of the mud. It clung to their knees and caught at their hands. Margot lay limply on Robin’s back, and now and then Germaine put up a muddy arm to steady her. Once she whispered, “Let me carry her now,” but he shook his head. The blood pounded behind his ears and in his eyeballs. There was a ringing sound all around him. When they reached the end of the field and the stretch of ground behind it, he turned and spoke in Germaine’s ear. “We’ll have to run between flashes. That’s what the scouts do. The trenches are there at the right. Wait for a flash and you’ll see them. When

I say the word, run for them. They'll think you're a scout coming back. They won't fire on any one coming to their own trench that way. I'll be carrying the girl, so I may not make it so quickly. Don't look back, just run with all your might." In the flicker of light Germaine saw Robin's face and his cheery smile, and she nodded. "Now, then, when the darkness comes. Straight to the right. Quick!" Robin whispered.

She was off like a flash and she could hear that he was just behind her. She could hear his breathing and was thankful with all her heart that Margot was so light a weight. They sped through the smoky blackness and it was like a jump in the dark between life and death. They ran blindly in the direction that had been their goal as they came across the field. Suddenly they felt the rise of ground and the faint sound of life which told them that they had reached the trench. They climbed like monkeys, the dirt falling away from their feet. Germaine reached the top and, falling, was caught by a man with a rifle. Robin reached the top with his burden, stooped with it to some one else in khaki, and as he did so the light came and with it a flash. Something hot and sharp caught him in the back. He fell forward and though there was a swift, bright illumination in the trench and beyond it, for him there was only darkness.

CHAPTER XX

ENGLAND AND APRIL

"It's England and April. I've always dreamed about the two together, and now they've come true!" Mehitable leaned over the balustrade of the balcony off Young Madame's room at the Convalescent Home, speaking to Philippe who stood on the garden path below her.

"Remember to be ready at two sharp. We want plenty of time before tea," Philippe called back.

Mehitable nodded gravely, leaning farther over the balustrade. "I'm going to tell your mother before I go. Oh, Philippe, what if she should not want me to go. She's so understanding, but——"

"Mehitable Webster, you're a fat head to say anything at all to mother about Langfrai," interrupted Philippe, turning toward the gate.

"Hush, she's coming. I shall tell her." Mehitable said this last in a loud whisper which could have been heard as far as the street.

"Please, Mehitable, don't let us have any more catastrophes. You will fall into the garden if you're not careful," came a laughing voice behind her, and turning she saw that Young Madame had come out on to the balcony. Mehitable ran up to her. "Phil-

ippe's just going. There he is at the gate. He's waving," she said.

Young Madame sat down in a basket chair near the balustrade, smiled, and waved her hand at her son's retreating form. Then she turned to Mehitable, still smiling. "What is the matter, child? You have a face as tragic as Duse's." She held out her hand to Mehitable. "I know what it is," she went on, "you've been staying in too closely with me these four days since you came. You need to be having fun with Philippe. You must promise to stay out all the afternoon."

Mehitable smiled faintly, standing with her arm on the back of Young Madame's chair. "Yes, I'm going out this afternoon, but that's it—that's the trouble. I want to tell you something and I don't know what you'll say." Mehitable gazed off with anxious eyes at the thousands of short, stubby, brown smokestacks of London. Young Madame laughed softly.

"Mehitable," she said, "you've been having an adventure. I'm sure of it. Well, out with it. Tell me the secret."

"It's this. I've a friend who lived in a cave on the moor. It's the boy who rescued Philippe when he hurt his ankle. Philippe says he just told you that some one took him in. You see, Langfrai wanted it kept a secret then, for he didn't want any one to know where he lived because he'd run away. You see, he didn't decide to come to London until after he met Philippe and knew more about all that was happening in the war. The first time I saw him he was standing in the cleft of a rock and a golden bird lighted on his

arm. He was standing in the sunshine and he looked—oh, he's unlike any one in the world. It's so hard to describe him." *Mehitable* paused for breath, her eyes shining and an unusual color in her face.

Young *Madame* was still smiling. "Why don't you sit down if it's going to be a long story," she suggested.

Mehitable sat down on the edge of the balustrade. She was so in earnest and so intent on what she had to say that she hardly knew that she did it. "It is a long story, in a way, but it's hard to explain in words. You see, *Langfrai* was very shy. He hadn't seen any human beings but old *Backbow*, who used to be his father's servant, and who is gardener now at *Cluthers*, for a year and a half, but somehow he seemed to know right away that I loved the moor as he did, and he asked me to come to his home in the cave." *Mehitable* hesitated, looking across at Young *Madame*, who returned her gaze a little anxiously.

"Did you go with him to his home in the cave, *Mehitable*?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, that was the wonderful thing about it all. Just think of it. He made a home right in the rocks. He even had a rock fireplace to cook in. He was so gentle and kind to me and he let me look at his books—'*Cyrano de Bergerac*' was one of them. He made tea and we had it by the rock fireplace and he told me wonderful things about old times when there were the border warfares, and he told me how he had hated living with his cousins in *Glasgow* and had run away to the moor——"

"Did you tell my mother-in-law that you went to

Langfrai's home in the cave?" asked Young Madame.

Mehitable shook her head as she answered. "No, I didn't dare. I knew that she would not have approved of it at all. Why, I was 'way beyond the tarn and we are only allowed to go as far as the tarn. Madame would not have understood. She would have been angry——"

"Yet she trusted you when she told you that you could go out on the moor. It was good of her to allow it, because she has old-fashioned ideas about girls. It seems a pity that you disobeyed her." Young Madame spoke gravely.

Mehitable clasped her hands, the tears touching her cheeks. Young Madame reached out and laid a hand on Mehitable's two clasped ones. "You are telling me, at any rate, and I want you to tell me more. Why is it that this boy seems so wonderful to you?" She spoke gently. "Remember that you are my own brown-haired girl, Mehitable. I'm not scolding you, only I want you to learn to think for yourself. Life isn't just moors and tarns and adventures, dear. Tell me more about Langfrai." She smiled at Mehitable.

"Well, he loves animals so. He can do anything with them and he was so happy on the moor. He was never lonely. Then Philippe came and suddenly, Langfrai says, he woke up. He knew that he must do his share in the war, and he came to London and is living with Backbow's brother in, or rather over, a furniture shop. I'm sure it's a very Dickensy sort of place. I used to hide books for him in a rock, and he said he would write to me, but he never has. Oh, mother, he has not written because he is eating his

heart out for the moor, I'm sure of it. I want to go and see him with Philippe to-day, but it didn't seem right to go without telling you. Do say that I may go." Mehitable looked entreatingly at Young Madame. She had called her "mother," the name she loved best for her. "I hoped that he could know you and Philippe. Oh, you were so lovely to me when I was so unhappy and lonely. Won't you be good to Langfrai, too?"

Young Madame proved that she could be "good to Langfrai" when she suggested that they take him to Fullers' for tea and that she would go with them if they would come back for her in Philippe's car. She had been out for several short drives since she had come to London and declared that she was quite strong enough for this.

So Mehitable and Philippe started out a little after two. Mehitable wore a short tan coat and a wide black straw hat which had a soft, fluffy plume at the side. Young Madame had driven, herself, to Marshall Snelgraves, on Oxford Street, to look for them. There was something about Mehitable, as she drove off with Philippe, which had the look of a mother's care. The mother whom Mehitable had never known could not have thought for her more tenderly.

London in April, London at war, khaki everywhere, motor lorries, ambulances, excitement. Mehitable's heart beat high with excitement. She loved every bit of it, the crowds and the thrills in the air, the bustle and confusion of Picadilly, the fresh spring wind. Tottenham Court Road was so crowded that they made slow progress, but at last they reached the number,

and Philippe drove up in front of the shop. Old furniture loomed darkly against the windows and an old man stood in the open doorway. Philippe went up to him. "Can you tell me if a boy lives here named Langfrai, please?" he asked, and the old man by way of answer looked back into the shop.

"Langfrai, tha's wanted," he called, and the next minute Langrai appeared beside him in the doorway. He stood perfectly still for a moment, his eyes on Mehitable. Then his face lighted and he stretched out both hands.

A long time afterward Langfrai told Mehitable of what their coming had meant to him. "It was like a dream, a fairy story. The shop—but you cannot know, Mehitable. Shut your eyes and think of the moor, and then of Tottenham Court Road."

They took him with them to the Tower and he drank in the wonder and terror of it. They drove through Regent's Park and down the Mall. Then they went back to the Convalescent Home, for Young Madame, and motored with her to Fullers', where they had a table in a window overlooking Regent's Street and where they had hot toast and delicious tea. Langfrai had been running errands and counting change, earning his living as any other young apprentice might have done, but he was still the moor boy, with his graceful head, his wild, strange face and gentle voice. They talked of the moor, of the baby fox, Scrappy, whom Backbow was caring for, of the cave and the tarn, and to Mehitable and Langfrai it seemed as though those things that were so dear to

them were very close, even in the crowded London tea room.

Young Madame looked at *Mehitable* once when *Langfrai* and *Philippe* were talking, and whispered, "You're right, *Mehitable*. He is different. He's like a bird in a cage. We must help him, somehow." This made *Mehitable* very happy, and she was happier still when her older friend turned to *Langfrai* and gently questioned him. *Langfrai* answered her in his courteous way. He was trying to earn his living. He loved best staying in the cave in the moor, but *Philippe* had made him see that it was selfish. He did not say that he did not like the shop in the Tottenham Court Road, but they all felt that this was so. They admired his pluck in not saying so. When they left him at the shop door a few minutes later Young Madame leaned forward, and spoke to him earnestly. "*Langfrai*, you and *Mehitable* and *Philippe* are friends, and I want to be your friend, too. You say that your evenings are free, so come to us and we four will see what adventures we can find in London, and when I am stronger perhaps I can help you to find some war work, since that is what you really want." She smiled at him and held out her hand. For the first time, *Langfrai* was glad that he had had the courage to leave what he had loved most in all the world, the moor.

They were late in reaching the Convalescent Home, and a servant told them that a lady was waiting to see them in Young Madame's sitting room and that she had come particularly to see the young American lady. *Mehitable* felt at once that it must be Miss

Meadows, who she knew was coming to London from Folkestone in a few days. She ran on upstairs ahead of the others, her face wreathed in smiles, the new black hat in her hand, through the hall to the sitting room, and the next moment she was hugging her dear Miss Meadows with all her might.

"Mehitable, Mehitable, what have I done!" Miss Meadows' hearty voice was broken. "You'll need the courage we all have to have these days, dear, for I've bad news for you. Robin has been wounded—there, there, he's living still. You pray that he will live, Mehitable. Why did I bring him over with me?" Staunch, strong Miss Meadows for the moment had lost her nerve, and for that moment Mehitable had to be strong for her.

"You brought him because you knew he was fine and big and splendid. That's why you brought him, and he did not come in vain. Oh, Miss Meadows, he's had his chance." Mehitable clung to her friend now, sobbing, too, and she heard Miss Meadows' voice answering her.

"Yes, he's had his chance, but he's so young, so young!"

CHAPTER XXI

UNA WINS OUT

UNA slammed her copy of "*Les Romanesques*" on to her desk and looked across at José. "There's time for a stroll before tea. What do you say?"

José nodded as she put her notebook away in her desk. She had been more unbending since the night when she had appeared suddenly among the girls, and asked to join them at the midnight feast. She and Una had an odd kind of acquaintance which had developed since Mehitable had left the week before. It was coming close to the boundary of friendship, and as they walked off together across the moor with the freshness of early April all about them it deepened to friendship and was all the better because it had come slowly. José told Una about Margot as they wandered slowly over the bracken, and Una's warm, ready sympathy rewarded her for the confidence.

"I knew you'd had some sorrow, José. Mehitable told me. Oh, but I never dreamed of anything like this. It's like losing Peg, in a wild mob in a bombed city. José, José—no wonder that you wanted to steal away from our chatter here at Cluthers." Una caught José's arm. "She will be found. She must be," she said. "Oh, José, I know the girls think me foolish because I'm so restless here. They think my way to

help in the war is just to stodge away here because my family want me to."

"You have done well this past week, chérie," José said to her. "You have been brave, though you have longed for the *Mehitable* we both miss so much. You speak of staying here when you would be away. What do you think of me, who would go through death to find my little sister? She is never absent from my thought for a moment. She is so young and weak, my Margot. I stay because I've been ordered to do it by my uncle, who is a great soldier. He said that I must trust him, just as soldiers trust their officers." José smiled a little, slipping her arm in Una's. There was a tinge of color in her cheeks which seemed to come from the newly awakened moor, but the sadness in her eyes was unchanged. "Do you know, Una, I am hungry for the first time since that dreadful night in October. I shall enjoy my tea, to-day. It's the spring. How I hope my darling feels it, too." As she spoke, for the first time since her great trouble, tears came into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. The worst of the bitterness of her grief was over.

"It will be tea time when we reach Cluthers. You and I will make a famous tea. I'm not really good at all about staying on here, José. I'm liable to break out at any time, but just this last week I have tried not to think of myself." Una put her hand up to the crystal heart which she wore under her blouse on a white ribbon. No one would ever know what a comfort it had been to her the past week.

They came into the garden, gay with red and gold tulips, waved to Fanny and Tip, and went into the

dining room. Noel was at her place at the head of the table, behind the big, brown teapot. She had come back that morning. There had been no reason for her staying home, and she had felt that she must go on with her studies as soon as possible. She expected to go to Cheltenham, a big English woman's college, the next year, and it was important that she pass her examinations in the spring. She was the same Noel, quiet, gentle, in her simple black frock, but there was sorrow in her eyes.

"Una O'Hara, hi, there, Una! I've got something for you! Just you wait and see. I bet your sister's coming up for the week-end. You know she wrote you she would!" Tip flopped down beside Una, a telegram in her hand. There was silence at the tea table. One did not like to see telegrams at Cluthers.

Una turned to Nancy who sat on her other side. José was opposite. "You open it, Nan. Maybe it's from Mehitable. You know she sent us one after she arrived. You open it, Nan."

Nancy put down a piece of bread and butter and took up the telegram. "It may not be anything to fash about, Una," she said. She was missing Mehitable more than any of them. She opened the telegram and for a moment after she had read it she sat very still, looking down. Una turned to her, putting her hand over the piece of paper in her lap, but not reading it. "Is it Miles or Patrick, Nan?" she asked, and those about her thought her voice sounded unlike the voice of the Una O'Hara they knew.

Nancy turned and faced her squarely. "It's neither, Una. It's Robin. He's been wounded in the back.

There's a fighting chance for him, the wire says. It's from Mehitable. Miss Meadows heard yesterday."

Una read the telegram and then stood up. "I want to see Madame," she said quietly. She went out of the room and closed the door softly behind her. Then she ran upstairs and knocked at Madame's study and when she heard the word, "*Entrez*," went into the room. Madame looked up from her desk, and when she saw Una's face she put down her pen and motioned her to a seat. She had been very busy all the afternoon and had given orders not to be disturbed and for that reason she had not known that a telegram had come for Una.

Una went over to the window, then turned. Her small face and pointed chin had the look that Mehitable knew so well, a look of indomitable decision, but there was something more than that in her face. "Madame, I have had news that one of my dearest friends has been perhaps mortally wounded. He is a friend of Mehitable's, too, and it was she who sent me the wire. It is Robin Ward from Cherryville." Una spoke quietly, meeting Madame's gaze unflinchingly as she went on. "I am going to London to-night, Madame. Backbow must be ready to take me to the station, please." She was never at any time in the least afraid or ill at ease with Madame, and at the moment she did not care in the least that Madame was angry.

"You strangely forget yourself, Mademoiselle O'Hara. You must be out of your senses to tell me what you will or will you not do! You will go back to the schoolroom, if you please, at once." People generally obeyed Madame as quickly as was humanly

possible when she used that certain tone. She stood up as she spoke, her sharp black eyes fastened on Una, who was facing her, and who returned her gaze.

"Yes, I'll go to the schoolroom, of course, if you wish me to, Madame, but I'm absolutely in earnest when I say that I am going to London." Una came up to the desk as she spoke and something in her face checked the words on Madame's lips. "There isn't any use in trying to make you see my point of view, Madame, and I'm not going to try. You have never tried to understand any of us, and it is not likely that you will begin to do so, with me. There is no way that you can keep me here at Cluthers except to put me into a room by force, and lock the door. The outer walls of this house are covered entirely with ivy, and ivy is tough and strong. I could climb down. I have money enough to travel with, and if you took it away from me I know I could find someone at the station across the moor who would trust me with money enough to send a wire to London. I could tell any one that I was Colonel O'Hara's daughter and every one in England knows his service to his country." Una stopped speaking and waited for a word from Madame. None came. Madame sat down suddenly in her chair by the desk, putting her handkerchief to her lips. She was white and her hands shook. The past months had been a great strain to her and she was sixty-five years old. Her daughter-in-law's danger had added to her many worries and her son was in the front trenches in France. She seemed suddenly too tired and bewildered to cope with this passionate, dauntless girl who was too deeply serious in what she

said to be considered simply impertinent and rebellious.

"You are right. I do not understand," Madame said weakly. The next moment Una was kneeling on the floor beside her. "What have I said, Madame! Oh, forgive me! I say so many things when I am in a mood. Believe me, I did not mean to be impertinent. I do respect your authority. I do honor you, but this is greater than I, Madame. Try to think of me as one of the wild O'Haras of long ago. Let me be free for a week. Let me go to London and stay with Molly. She is longing to see me. I'll come back with *Mehitable*. You can punish me in any way you like for anything I've said and done when I come back. Only let me go, now." Una looked up at Madame as she went on. "You'll know how I wanted to go when I tell you that one night I ran away. I left a note for *Mehitable* and she woke up and found it and came after me and brought me back. I've tried since to do my bit, by staying here at school, and doing my lessons and not having moods, but I'm not made that way. Now that this news has come of my friend, Madame, try to understand, I must go. I'll be so good when I come back. I entreat you, Madame, to let me go." Una put both hands on Madame's arm as she spoke.

Madame nodded, "Yes, Una," she said quietly, "you may go." There was something so grave in her tones that a sudden fear came to Una. All at once *Cluthers*, the girls, the moor, and the tarn, Madame, herself, seemed very dear, and the thought of never coming back was cruel.

"You don't mean—Madame, you'll let me come back? It isn't for always? I love Cluthers. It's odd, but suddenly I cannot bear to think of not coming back." Una put her hand to her forehead in her quick, nervous way.

"You may come back again, my child," Madame said, and there was an unmistakeable twinkle in her eye. Una would never know how those last words of hers had pleased her schoolmistress. Madame stood up and was at once the crisp, executive woman that all her pupils knew. "I shall make arrangements for you to go to-morrow, but you are to return with *Mehitable*. I will send a wire to your sister to-night. You are young, my child, you are young. The war has touched you. It is near us all. I feel for you. I, too, would fly away if I could, straight to the battlefields to my son," she said.

Una caught Madame's hand and kissed it. "Thank you, Madame. I'll show you when I come back that I am grateful," she said.

She thought of the scene in Madame's study many times in the next day. She wanted to remember every word of it to tell *Mehitable*, who would find it incredible. She left on an early train in the morning and saw only José, to say good-by. She put both arms around the Belgian girl and hugged her. "I wish I could bring sunshine back to you, José," she said.

Mehitable, Molly, and Philippe met her at Paddington station and they drove in Philippe's car to a restaurant for supper. It was a quiet place and they had a table in a corner. There was so much to say that they

did not say much of anything. Molly and Una had not seen each other for six months. But Una was very quiet, and Molly and Philippe did most of the talking. Mehitable's first words to Una at the station had been, "Miss Meadows hasn't heard again."

"How did you manage to charm Madame into letting you come, Kid? Mehitable and I are consumed with curiosity to know." Molly O'Hara smiled across at her sister. She was a pretty girl with pink cheeks and dark eyes. Her V. A. D.'s uniform became her.

"Yes, Una, how did you manage it?" Mehitable leaned forward eagerly. There were dark rings under her eyes and she seemed changed.

"I—, Madame just let me come. That's all." Una could not think of any way of describing her scene with Madame before them all. "You look grown-up, Mehitable. You've put up your hair. Turn your head and let me see. What a bunch of it you have. Isn't that tan coat adorable! Mehitable, you don't look a bit Cluthersy." They all smiled at Una's words and in spite of her anxiety, Mehitable felt comforted that she did look grown-up, because she felt that way.

"I can't have you to-night, Kid. I'm on night duty so you're to be with Madame de Villiers and Mehitable. To-morrow Philippe will bring you over in his car. Now I must simply fly." Molly sprang up, patted Una's cheek and nodded to the others. There was little time for suppers and chatting in her life now.

Una had a delightful welcome from Young

Madame, and the three sat out on the balcony of the Convalescent Home until very late. They were too anxious about Robin to talk very much and it was not until the two girls had gone to bed in the room off Young Madame's, that it seemed to Una that she could talk at all. Then she told Mehitable about her talks with José on the moor, of the telegram, and finally of the half hour in Madame's study. Then she listened while Mehitable told her of the visit to Lang-frai and of Young Madame's promising to befriend him and of the dreadful news which had awaited them on their return.

Miss Meadows came for them with a taxi the next morning and they went for a drive in Regent's Park. She was so tired and worn and worried that at first she did not seem to either Mehitable or Una the brisk, cheery friend with whom they had had such good times in Paris the spring before. Miss Meadows had sent several telegrams to the trench hospital from which she had received the news of Robin's sad condition, but she had had no further news. "It's like that all the time, girls. You see you haven't any idea what it's like. To us just now, Robin seems the only thing. But remember there are thousands of others feeling just that way about their boys and more telegrams are going back and forth than can be handled. I cabled the Wards in Cherryville, and of course the hospital did, also. There will be a notice in the papers in a day or so but not before to-morrow, I think. They are very careful not to have any word of a casualty printed until the families are notified. The British learned that lesson in the Boer War. Oh, my dear

girls, I do love Robin. He was the gayest, brightest, most charming boy in the world." The tears ran down Miss Meadows' cheeks and she gazed sadly off at the bright flower beds of the park.

"Don't say 'was,' Miss Meadows. He will be that way, again." Mehitable nestled close to Miss Meadows. They were out all the rest of the day, taking Young Madame with them in the afternoon. Miss Meadows 'phoned her hotel several times to see if there were a telegram for her but there was no word of any kind. They dined on the balcony off Young Madame's room, and every time the 'phone rang some one would jump up and answer it.

"The waiting is the hardest of all, isn't it?" Una whispered to Mehitable who nodded, swallowing a big lump in her throat.

Young Madame was the one who helped most to make the evening less dismal. She was lovely in her soft gray frock, a string of pearls about her throat. To Mehitable she meant all that she had missed in her early life in the way of sympathy and understanding. To Young Madame, she was the "brown-haired girl," for whom she had always wished. There were many things that made life a difficult problem for Young Madame at the moment. Her husband was in the front trenches. She, herself, in spite of the wonderful recovery she had made, was far from strong, and Philippe was a great worry. The doctors had told her that he would not be strong enough for active service, which if the war continued was what he hoped for. He would have to be content with what he could do in London, and already he was begin-

ning to fret against doing just the everyday things which came his way. His mother found the companionship of *Mehitable* very sweet. As they sat there on the balcony that April night, having their coffee, she thought wistfully of the time when she might have a little home and a garden in the country in England, and in her thought *Mehitable* was a part of that home as well as *Philippe*.

Miss Meadows cheered a little after dinner and told them some interesting incidents of her life at Folkestone. *Philippe* sang a French troubadour song with *Una* accompanying him and the latter part of the evening was brighter than the beginning.

"I had hoped that *Mehitable's* friend, *Langfrai*, would come and see us. We asked him to come to dinner but he said he could not leave the shop where he is working until eight o'clock. It is so late now perhaps he will not come." Almost as *Young Madame* spoke there came a knock at the door. *Philippe* opened it, and *Langfrai* stood on the threshold, his eyes shining, his hair tossed across his forehead. He ran across the room, waving a paper which he held in his hand. "Madame—good-evening. Oh, *Mehitable*, there is news. I heard the 'Stop Press' and bought a paper as I walked down the Tottenham Court Road. They are found, both of them, the girl, *Margot Blanc*, and another."

Mehitable was never very clear about the rest of the evening. She was radiantly glad one moment and desperately anxious the next. *Philippe* took the paper from *Langfrai* and read aloud:

"One of the most startling incidents of the war occurred day before yesterday when Robert Caudwell Ward, a messenger in the A. M. C., rescued two Belgian girls on the outskirts of No Man's Land and carried one of them, under fire, to a British trench. Young Ward was shot in the back as he climbed the trench and his condition is critical. He has not regained consciousness and is known only by his identification disk. The girls give their names as Margot Valeris Blanc and Germaine Pernaut. They are uninjured but in a condition of great fatigue. They are being cared for at a division headquarters and will soon be able to leave for England. Mademoiselle Blanc begs all readers to help her in finding her sister, José Therese Blanc, whom she hopes may have escaped to England. The sisters were separated at the siege of Antwerp. The two Belgian girls spent the night of their rescue in the British trench, where they were cared for as well as was possible. The military cross is to be awarded Robert Ward. In the case of his death it will be sent to his parents in Cherryville, Vermont, U. S. A., that being the address found on his body."

Philippe had to stop and swallow hard once or twice as he read, and the others, except Langfrai, cried softly. Miss Meadows was the first to speak. "That article must have been written yesterday. They weren't allowed to publish it until I'd been notified. We may have fresh news now any time." The 'phone rang sharply, and she sat down by it, drawing a little pad and pencil toward her. When she put up the receiver and looked at them, as they gathered around

her, something of the old, jolly Miss Meadows was in her face again.

"Good news. This is the telegram," she cried. "'Robert Ward's condition less critical. He has recovered consciousness and wishes you to communicate with Madame Cateau's school, address, Cluthers, Windfell, Yorkshire, at once as regards the sister of Margot Blanc.'"

Miss Meadows held out her hand to *Mehitable*, who stood beside her. "This is a great night for *Cherryville*, isn't it, *Mehitable*," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

BY THE TARN

"SUNSHINE for José. Sunshine for José." The words seemed to sing themselves across London as Una said them. "That's what I told her, Mehitable, I said, 'How I wish I could bring sunshine back for you, José.'" Una turned and smiled at Young Madame, who had come out to join them on the balcony. "Isn't life wonderful! Robin's out of danger and José's gone to Folkestone to meet Margot and Germaine. This last week has been glorious." Una danced around the balcony.

"I was telling Mehitable last night that she can have a garden all her own, this summer at Brierwall. That is the name we've decided on for our house. She and Philippe are to dig in it all day and lose their pale cheeks. You may come and dig, too, if you like." Young Madame laughed at Una's delighted face.

"That's ripping, you know, because I really haven't any family to go home to and Garth Hall will be so lonely. I'm going to help Miss Meadows, but there will be time to play, too." Una waltzed up to Mehitable and took her arm. "Come on for a waltz or let's try a fox trot, old top," she said.

Mehitable shook her head. "I couldn't, Una. I feel everything so deeply, to-day. There is so much

to be thankful for. When I think of Langfrail! He's so wonderful! Miss Meadows needs him and she's taking him to Folkestone where he can help with canteen work and with the refugees. He won't have to be in that awful shop in the Tottenham Court Road any longer. To-morrow we're going back to the moor. He won't have that any longer."

Miss Meadows' voice sounded from the doorway. She was looking very trig and taut in her uniform and there was a ruddy color in her cheeks. "They let me come right up and I found the door ajar, so I walked right in. Good news again this morning. Robin's coming on well and he's not permanently injured, thank God. *Mehitable*, will you come for a stroll with me. I'd like to have a little talk with you before you go and this is my best time."

Mehitable ran for her hat and jacket and met Miss Meadows in the hall. "That's good. I did want a chat with you. There are always so many people about," she said as they went down the steps, out into the glorious April day.

"I wish I had something cheerful to tell you, *Mehitable*, but I haven't. I think you ought to know that your Aunt Comfort is far from well and that *Desire* is worried about her. She's been in bed for weeks and doesn't seem to have the strength to get up. *Desire* wrote me, because she said she had to tell some one, and Miss Webster had forbidden her to write to you. I've only a quarter of an hour, as I have to meet a committee, but I didn't want you to go back to school without knowing about your Aunt Comfort. I've no patience with keeping things from people, and

I knew you'd want to know. Don't worry too much. Remember how our troubles have worked out lately. Things will come right. Now, child, I've just remembered a telegram I promised to send before the committee meeting, so I'll have to go, after all. I'll come up to Cluthers when I can. Write your aunt just as often as you can. Desire says she thinks more than half the trouble is her longing for you." Miss Meadows hailed a taxi, and Mehitable walked back slowly through the sunshine.

They went to Yorkshire the next morning and Philippe and Langfrai saw them off. Young Madame was with them, for the doctor had recommended Yorkshire air and her mother-in-law was anxious to see her. An ecstatic letter had come from José, who was to arrive with Margot and Germaine at the end of the week. The sisters had been reunited in Folkestone and "sunshine" had come for José.

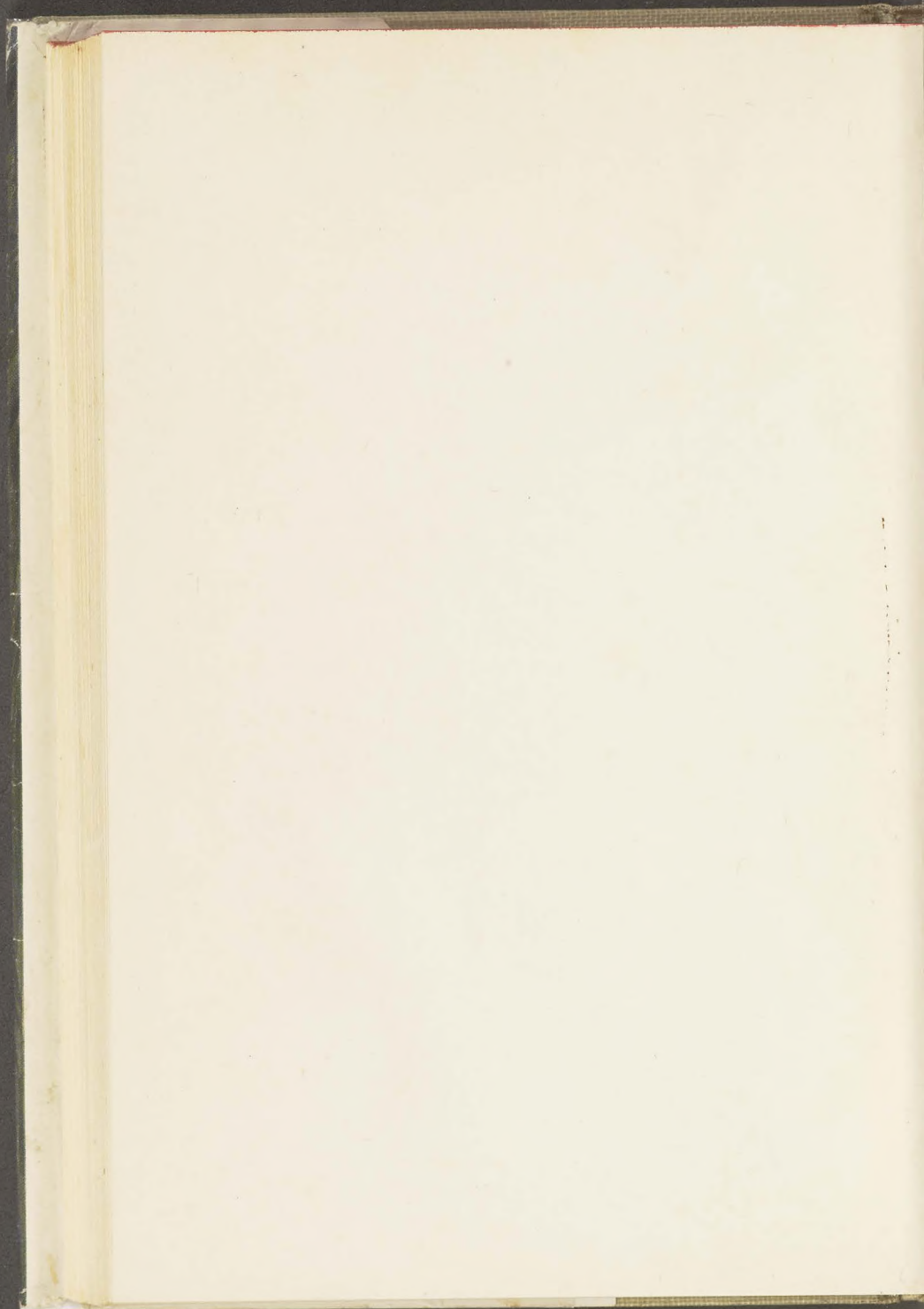
It was the day after their return when Mehitable went for her first glimpse of the tarn after her fortnight's absence. She did not tell any one that she was going and she walked slowly all the way. The time had come for her when she could no longer put by the question that had been with her since her talk with Miss Meadows in London the day before. When she reached the tarn she knew what she must do. She must go back to Cherryville in June. Miss Meadows would be able to arrange a passage for her, on one of the American boats. It was strange to realize it. She had turned away from the thought every time that it had come to her. This was her life, here with her new friends, with the thrilling war days around

her in London, the glory of the moor, and the unearthly beauty of the tarn. This was her life, finding Langfrai by the tarn, running through the night to bring Una back to Cluthers. Young Madame was her life, giving her the tenderness that might have been a mother's.

She was going back to Cherryville. That was life, too. The most vital part of it, her own flesh and blood in need of all she had to give. Love waited for her in Cherryville, Aunt Comfort's, Barbara's, Desire's. Ah, but she had not finished her education. There was so much yet to learn, of beauty, of people, of English gardens, her garden at the home of Young Madame. She wanted to stay. She knelt by the tarn and looked down into it. Her face shone palely back at her. Langfrai had left the moor and the tarn and she was going to leave it, too. She had made her decision. She would sail in June and she would not come back in the winter, but she would come some time. That she knew well. And when she came the tarn would be waiting for her.

THE END





Mehitable

BY KATHARINE ADAMS

"Someday something will happen to me!"

Mehitable often dreamed of a world beyond Cherryville, Vermont, but it was not until the evening of her sixteenth birthday that the letter with the foreign postmark arrived. After that, things began to happen so fast that almost before she knew it, Mehitable found herself on the liner bound for France!

She could scarcely believe that she was actually on her way to the chateau school just outside Paris, where an old friend of her family had offered to send her. But once in school, Mehitable, thrilled by the strange, foreign atmosphere, soon made a place for herself and found new and interesting friends there, among them the lovely Irish girl, Una O'Hara, and forthright Tip Manders.

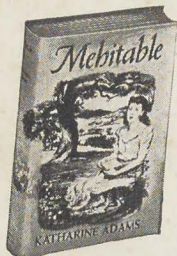
Readers will share every exciting moment of Mehitable's adventures in Paris, Belgium, and Ireland; and every girl will love the mystery and romance that characterize this book, which many consider to be one of Katharine Adams' finest stories.

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